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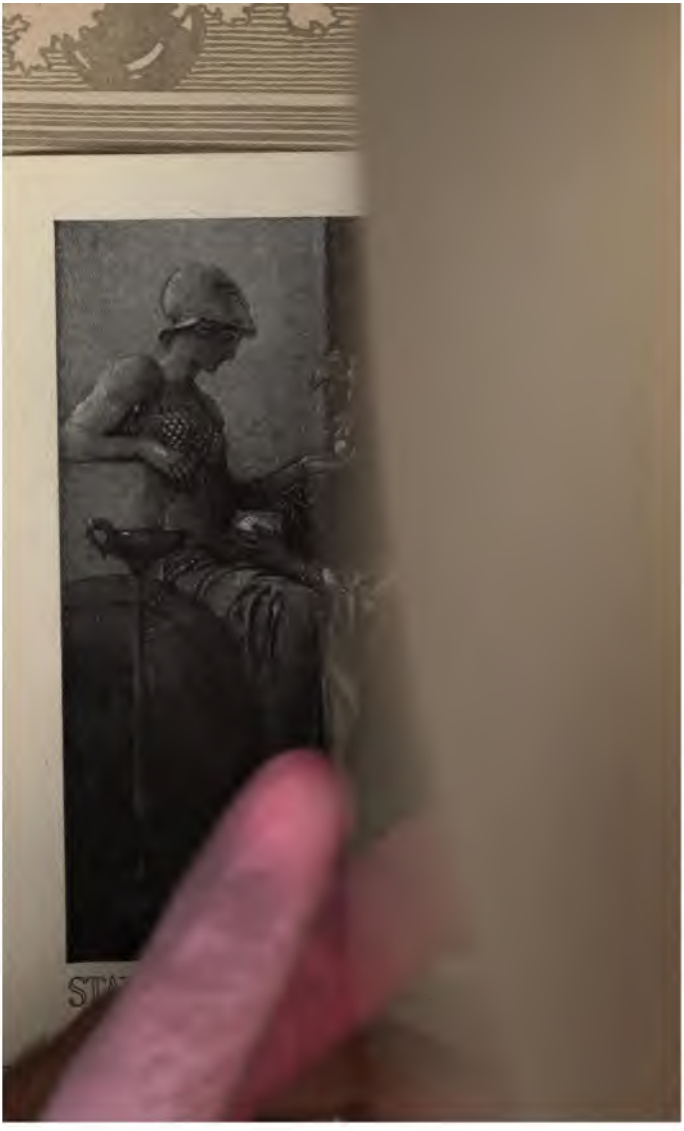

Balsamo and Lorenza.

THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

THE MEMOIRS OF A PHYSICIAN

Volume Two

The Marie Antoinette Romances

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CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT ALTHOTAS WANTED TO COMPLETE HIS ELIXIR.

On the day after that on which this conversation took place, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, Balsamo was seated in his cabinet, in the Rue Saint Claude, occupied in reading a letter which Fritz had just brought him. The letter was without signature. He turned it over and over in his hands. "I know this writing," said he, — "large, irregular, slightly tremulous, and full of faults in orthography;" and he read it once more. It ran as follows: —

Monsieur le Comte, — A person who consulted you some time before the fall of the late ministry, and who had consulted you a long time previously, will wait upon you to-day, in order to have another consultation. Will your numerous occupations permit you to grant this person a quarter of an hour between four and five this evening?

After reading this for the second or third time, Balsamo fell back into his train of reflection. "It is not worth while to consult Lorenza for such a trifle," said he; "besides, can I no longer divine anything by myself? The writing is large, — a sign of aristocracy; irregular and trembling, — a sign of age; full of faults in orthography, — it must be a courtier. Ah, stupid creature that I am! it is the Duc de Richelieu. Most certainly I shall have an hour at your service, Monsieur le Duc, — an hour did I say? — a day! Make my time your own. Are you not,

without knowing it, one of my mysterious agents, one of my familiar demons? Do we not both pursue the same task? Do we not both shake the monarchy at the same time, — you by making yourself its presiding genius, I by declaring myself its enemy? Come, then, Duke, I am ready!" and Balsamo consulted his watch, to see how long he must yet wait for the duke.

At that moment a bell sounded in the cornice of the ceiling. "What can be the matter?" said Balsamo, starting. "Lorenza calls me; she wishes to see me. Can anything unpleasant have happened to her? or is it a return of those fits of passion which I have so often witnessed, and of which I have been at times the victim? Yesterday she was thoughtful, gentle, resigned; she was as I love to see her. Poor child! I must go to her." He arranged his dress, glanced at the mirror, to see if his hair was not too much in disorder, and proceeded toward the stairs, after having replied to Lorenza's request as she had made it, by ringing a bell.

But, according to his custom, Balsamo paused in the apartment adjoining that occupied by the young woman; and turning, with his arms crossed, toward the place where he supposed her to be, he commanded her to sleep, with that powerful will which recognized no obstacles. Then, as if doubting his own power, or as if he thought it necessary to redouble his precautions, he looked into the apartment through an almost imperceptible crevice in the woodwork.

Lorenza was sleeping upon a couch, where, no doubt, tottering under the influence of her master's will, she had sought a support for her sinking limbs. A painter could not have suggested a more poetic attitude. Panting and subdued beneath the power of the subtle fluid which Balsamo had poured upon her, Lorenza seemed like one of

those beautiful Ariadnes of Vanloo, with rounded breasts, and features expressive of fatigue or despair.

Balsamo entered by his usual passage, and stopped for a moment before her, to contemplate her sleeping countenance. He then awoke her; she was too dangerous thus.

As she opened her eyes, a piercing glance escaped from between the half-closed lids; then, as if to collect her scattered thoughts, she smoothed back her long hair with her hands, dried her lips, moist with slumber, and searching deeply her memory, she brought together her scattered recollections.

Balsamo looked at her with some anxiety. He had been long accustomed to the sudden transition from winning love to outbursts of anger and hatred; but this appearance, to which he was entirely unused, — the calmness with which Lorenza on this occasion received him, instead of with one of her customary bursts of hatred, — announced something more serious, perhaps, than he had yet witnessed.

Lorenza sat up on the couch; and fixing her deep, soft eyes upon Balsamo, she said, "Pray be good enough to take a seat near me."

Balsamo started at the sound of her voice, expressing, as it did, such unusual mildness.

"Near you!" said he. "You know, my Lorenza, that I have but one wish, — to pass my life at your feet."

"Monsieur," replied Lorenza, in the same tone, "I pray you to be seated, — although, indeed, I have not much to say to you; but, short as it is, I shall say it better, I think, if you are seated."

"Now, as ever, my beloved Lorenza, I will do as you wish;" and he took a chair near Lorenza, who was still seated upon the couch.

"Monsieur," said she, fixing her heavenly eyes upon Balsamo, "I have summoned you to request from you a favor."

"Oh, my Lorenza!" exclaimed Balsamo, more and more delighted, "anything you wish! Speak; you shall have everything!"

"I wish for only one thing; but I warn you that I wish for that most ardently."

"Speak, Lorenza, speak! should it cost my fortune, or half my life!"

"It will cost you nothing, Monsieur, but a moment of your time," replied the young woman.

Balsamo, enchanted with the turn the conversation was taking, was already tasking his fertile imagination to supply a list of those wishes which Lorenza was likely to form, and above all, those which he could satisfy. "She will, perhaps," thought he, "ask for a servant or a companion. Well, even this immense sacrifice — for it would compromise my secret and my friends — I will make, for the poor child is in truth very unhappy in her solitude. Speak quickly, my Lorenza!" said he aloud, with a smile full of love.

"Monsieur," said she, "you are aware that I am dying of melancholy and weariness."

Balsamo sighed, and bent his head in token of assent.

"My youth," continued Lorenza, "is wasting; my days are one long sigh, — my nights a continual terror. I am growing old in solitude and anguish."

"Your life is what you have made it, Lorenza," said Balsamo; "it is not my fault that this life which you have made so sad is not one to make a queen envious."

"Be it so. Therefore, you see, I have recourse to you in my distress."

"Thanks, Lorenza!"

"You are a good Christian, you have sometimes told me, although — "

"Although you think me a lost soul, you would say. I complete your thought, Lorenza."

"Suppose nothing except what I tell you, Monsieur; and I beg you will conjecture nothing."

"Proceed, then."

"Well, instead of leaving me buried in these angers and despairs, grant me, since I am of no service to you — "

She stopped to glance at Balsamo; but he had regained his command over himself, and she saw only a cold look and contracted brow. She became animated as she met his almost threatening eye. "Grant me," she continued, "not liberty, — for I know that the will of God, or rather your will, which seems all-powerful to me, condemns me to perpetual captivity, — but at least to see human faces, to hear other voices than yours; permit me, in short, to go out, to walk, to have a part in life."

"I had foreseen this request, Lorenza," said Balsamo, taking her hand; "and you know that long since your wish has been also my own."

"Well, then!" exclaimed Lorenza.

"But," resumed Balsamo, "you have yourself prevented it. Like a madman that I was, — and every man who loves is a madman, — I allowed you to penetrate into some of my secrets, both of science and politics. You know that Althotas has discovered the philosopher's stone, and seeks the elixir of life. You know that I and my companions conspire against the monarchies of the world. The first of these secrets would cause me to be burned as a sorcerer; the other would be sufficient to condemn me to be broken on the wheel for high treason. Besides, you have threatened me, Lorenza; you have told me that you

would try every means to regain your liberty, and this liberty once regained, that the first use you would make of it would be to denounce me to Monsieur de Sartines. Did you not say so?"

"What can you expect? At times I lash myself to fury, and then I am half-mad."

"Are you calm and sensible now, Lorenza; and can we converse quietly together?"

"I hope so."

"If I grant you the liberty you desire, shall I find in you a devoted and submissive wife, a faithful and gentle companion? You know, Lorenza, this is my most ardent wish."

The young woman was silent.

"In one word, will you love me?" asked Balsamo, with a sigh.

"I am unwilling to promise what I cannot perform," said Lorenza; "neither love nor hatred depends upon ourselves. I hope that God, in return for your good actions, will permit my hatred toward you to take flight, and love to return."

"Unfortunately, Lorenza, such a promise is not a guarantee which will enable me to trust you. I require a positive, sacred oath, to break which would be a sacrilege, — an oath which binds you in this world as in the next; which involves your death in this world and your damnation in that which is to come."

Lorenza was silent.

"Will you take this oath?"

Lorenza hid her face in her hands, and her breast heaved under the influence of contending emotions.

"Take this oath, Lorenza, as I shall dictate it, with the solemnity in which I shall clothe it, and you shall be free."

"What must I swear, Monsieur?"

"Swear that you will never, under any pretext, betray what has come to your knowledge relative to the secrets of Althotas."

"Yes, I will swear it."

"Swear that you will never divulge what you know of our political meetings?"

"I will swear that also."

"With the oath and in the form which I shall dictate?"

"Yes. Is that all?"

"No; swear, — and this is the principal thing, Lorenza! for the other matters would endanger only my life, while upon what I am about to say depends my entire happiness, — swear that you will never leave me, Lorenza! Swear this, and you are free!"

The young woman started as if cold steel had pierced her heart.

"And in what form must the oath be taken?"

"We will enter a church together, and communicate at the same altar. You will swear on the host never to betray anything relating to Althotas or my companions. You will swear never to leave me. We will then divide the host in two, and each will take the half, you swearing before God that you will never betray me, and I that I will ever do my utmost to make you happy."

"No!" said Lorenza; "such an oath is a sacrilege."

"An oath, Lorenza, is never a sacrilege," replied Balsamo, sadly, "but when you make it with the intention of not keeping it."

"I will not take this oath," said Lorenza; "I should fear to imperil my soul."

"It is not — I repeat it — in taking an oath that you imperil your soul; it is in breaking it."

"I will not do it."

"Then have patience, Lorenza," said Balsamo, without anger, but with the deepest sadness.

Lorenza's brow darkened like an overshadowed plain when a cloud passes between it and the sun.

"Ah! you refuse?" said she.

"Not so, Lorenza; it is you who refuse."

A nervous movement indicated all the impatience the young woman felt at these words.

"Listen, Lorenza!" said Balsamo. "This is what I will do for you, and, believe me, it is much."

"Speak," said the young girl, with a bitter smile. "Let me see how far that generosity of which you make so much will extend."

"God, chance, or fate — call it what you will, Lorenza, — has united us by an indissoluble bond; do not attempt to break this bond in this life, for death alone can accomplish that."

"Proceed; I know that," said Lorenza, impatiently.

"Well, in one week, Lorenza, — whatever it may cost me, and however great the sacrifice I make, — in one week you shall have a companion."

"Where?" asked she.

"Here."

"Here!" she exclaimed, "behind these bars; behind these inexorable doors, these iron doors? — a fellow-prisoner? Oh! you cannot mean it, Monsieur; that is not what I ask."

"Lorenza, it is all that I can grant."

The young woman made a more vehement gesture of impatience.

"My dear child," resumed Balsamo, mildly, "reflect a little; with a companion you will more easily support the weight of this necessary misfortune."

"You mistake, Monsieur. Until now I have grieved

only for myself, not for others. This trial only was wanting, and I see that you wish to make me undergo it. Yes, you will immure beside me a victim like myself; I shall see her grow thinner and paler, and pine away with grief, even as I do. I shall see her beat, as I do, these walls, that hateful door, which I examine twenty times each day to see where it opens to give you egress; and when my companion, your victim, has, like me, wounded her hands against the marble blocks in her endeavors to disjoin them; when, like me, she has worn out her eyelids with her tears; when she is dead as I am, in soul and mind, and you have two corpses in place of one, you will say, in your infernal benevolence: 'These two young creatures amuse themselves; they keep each other company; they are happy!' Oh! no, no, no! — a thousand times no!" And she passionately stamped her foot upon the floor, while Balsamo endeavored in vain to calm her.

"Come, Lorenza," said he, "I entreat you to show a little more mildness and calmness. Let us reason on the matter."

"He asks me to be calm, to be gentle, to reason! The executioner tells the victim whom he is torturing, to be gentle, and the innocent martyr to be calm!"

"Yes, Lorenza, I ask you to be gentle and calm, for your anger cannot change our destiny; it only embitters it. Accept what I offer you, Lorenza; I will give you a companion who will hug her chains, since they have procured for her your friendship. You shall not see a sad and tearful face, such as you fear, but smiles and gayety which will smooth your brow. Come, dear Lorenza, accept what I offer; for I swear to you that I cannot offer you more."

"That means that you will place near me a hireling, to whom you will say: 'I give you in charge a poor insane

creature, who is ill and about to die; soothe her, share her confinement, attend to her comforts, and I will recompense you when she is no more.'"

"Oh, Lorenza! Lorenza!"

"No, that is not it; I am mistaken," continued Lorenza, with bitter irony; "I conjecture badly. But what can you expect? I am so ignorant, I know so little of the world. You will say to the woman: 'Watch over the madwoman, she is dangerous; report all her actions, all her thoughts, to me. Watch over her, waking and sleeping.' And you will give her as much gold as she requires, for gold costs you nothing, — you make it!"

"Lorenza, you wander; in the name of Heaven, Lorenza, read my heart more truly! In giving you a companion, my beloved, I compromise such mighty interests that you would tremble for me if you did not hate me. In giving you a companion, I endanger my safety, my liberty, my life; and yet I will risk all that to save you a little weariness."

"Weariness!" exclaimed Lorenza, with a wild and frantic laugh which made Balsamo shudder. "He calls it weariness!"

"Well, suffering! Yes, you are right, Lorenza; they are poignant sufferings. I repeat, Lorenza, have patience. A day will come when all your sufferings will cease; a day will come when you shall be free and happy."

"Will you permit me to retire to a convent and take the vows?"

"To a convent?"

"I will pray, — first for you, and then for myself. I shall be closely confined, indeed, but I shall at least have a garden, air, space. I shall have a cemetery to walk in, and can seek beforehand among the tombs for the place of my repose. I shall have companions who grieve for their

own sorrows, and not for mine. Permit me to retire to a convent, and I will take any vows you wish. A convent, Balsamo! I implore you on my knees to grant this request."

"Lorenza, Lorenza! we cannot part. Mark me well, we are indissolubly connected in this world! Ask for nothing which exceeds the limits of this house."

Balsamo pronounced these last words in so calm and determined a tone that Lorenza did not even repeat the request. "Then you refuse me?" said she, dejectedly.

"I cannot grant it."

"Is what you say irrevocable?"

"It is."

"Well, I have something else then to ask," said she, with a smile.

"Oh! my dear Lorenza, smile again, and still again. With such a smile you will compel me to do all you wish!"

"Oh, yes! I shall make you do all that I wish, provided I do everything that pleases you. Well! be it so; I will be as reasonable as possible."

"Speak, Lorenza, speak!"

"Just now you said: 'One day, Lorenza, your sufferings shall cease; one day you shall be free and happy.'"

"Oh, yes! I said so; and I swear before Heaven that I await that day as impatiently as yourself."

"Well, this day may arrive immediately, Balsamo," said the young Italian, with a caressing smile, which her husband had hitherto seen only in her sleep. "I am weary, very weary, — you can understand my feelings; I am so young, and have already suffered so much! Well, my friend, — for you say you are my friend, — listen to me: grant me this happy day immediately."

"I hear you," said Balsamo, inexpressibly agitated.

"I end my appeal by the request I should have made at the commencement, Acharat." The young woman shuddered.

"Speak, my beloved!"

"Well, I have often remarked, when you made experiments on some unfortunate animal, and when you told me that these experiments were necessary to the cause of humanity, — I have often remarked that you possessed the secret of inflicting death, sometimes by a drop of poison, sometimes by an opened vein; that this death was calm, rapid as lightning, and that these unfortunate and innocent creatures, condemned, as I am, to the miseries of captivity, were instantly liberated by death, — the first blessing they had received since their birth. Well —" She stopped, and turned pale.

"Well, my Lorenza?" repeated Balsamo.

"Well, what you sometimes do to these unfortunate animals for the interest of science, do now to me in the name of humanity. Do it for a friend, who will bless you with her whole heart, who will kiss your hands with the deepest gratitude, if you grant her what she asks. Do it, Balsamo, for me, who kneel here at your feet, who promise you with my last sigh more love and happiness than you have awakened in me during my whole life, — for me, Balsamo, who promise you a frank and beaming smile as I leave this earth! By the soul of your mother, by the sufferings of our Blessed Lord, by all that is holy and solemn and sacred in the world of the living and of the dead, I implore you, kill me, kill me!"

"Lorenza!" exclaimed Balsamo, taking her in his arms as she rose after uttering these last words, "Lorenza, you are delirious. Kill you, — you! my love! my life!"

Lorenza disengaged herself by a violent effort from Balsamo's grasp, and fell on her knees. "I will never

rise," said she, "until you have granted my request. Kill me without a shock, without violence, without pain. Grant me this favor, since you say you love me; send me to sleep as you have often done, — only, take away the awaking; it is despair!"

"Lorenza, my beloved!" said Balsamo. "O God! do you not see how you torture my heart? What! you are really so unhappy, then? Come, my Lorenza, rise; do not give way to despair. Alas! do you hate me then so very much?"

"I hate slavery, constraint, solitude; and as you make me a slave, unhappy, and solitary, — well, yes, I hate you!"

"But I love you too dearly to see you die, Lorenza. You shall not die, therefore; I will effect the most difficult cure I have yet undertaken, my Lorenza, — I will make you love life."

"No, no, that is impossible; you have made me long for death."

"Lorenza, for pity's sake! — I promise that soon — "

"Life or death!" exclaimed the young woman, becoming more and more excited. "This is the decisive day. Will you give me life, — that is to say, liberty? Will you give me death, — that is to say, repose?"

"Life, my Lorenza, life!"

"Then that is liberty."

Balsamo was silent.

"If not, death, — a gentle death; by a draught, a needle's point, — death during sleep! Repose, repose, repose!"

"Life and patience, Lorenza!"

Lorenza burst into a terrible laugh, and making a spring backward, drew from her bosom a knife, with a blade so fine and sharp that it glittered in her hand like a flash of lightning.

Balsamo cried out, but he was too late. When he rushed forward, when he reached the hand, the arm had already described its course, and had fallen on Lorenza's breast. Balsamo had been dazzled by the flash; he was blinded by the sight of blood. In his turn he uttered a terrible cry, and seized Lorenza round the waist, meeting midway her arm descending to deal a second blow, and grasping the weapon in his undefended hand. Lorenza with a mighty effort drew the weapon away, and the sharp blade glided through Balsamo's fingers. The blood streamed from his mutilated hand.

Then, instead of continuing the struggle, Balsamo extended his bleeding hand toward the young woman, and said, with a voice of irresistible command: "Sleep, Lorenza, sleep! I will it."

But on this occasion her irritation was such that her obedience was not as prompt as usual.

"No, no," murmured Lorenza, tottering and attempting to strike again. "No, I will not sleep!"

"Sleep, I tell you!" said Balsamo, a second time, advancing a step toward her; "sleep, I command it!"

This time the power of Balsamo's will was so great that all resistance was in vain. Lorenza heaved a sigh, let the knife fall from her hand, and sank back upon the cushions. Her eyes still remained open, but their threatening glare gradually died away, and finally they closed; her stiffened neck drooped; her head fell upon her shoulder like that of a wounded bird; a nervous shudder passed through her frame, — Lorenza was asleep.

Balsamo hastily opened her robe, and examined the wound, which seemed to him slight, although the blood flowed from it freely. He then pressed the lion's eye, the spring acted, and the back of the fireplace opened; then, detaching the counterpoise which made the trap-door of

Althotas's chamber descend, he leaped upon it, and mounted to the old man's laboratory.

"Ah! it is you, Acharat?" said the latter, who was still seated in his armchair. "You are aware that in a week I shall be a hundred years old. You are aware that before that time I must have the blood of a child, or of a virgin."

But Balsamo heard nothing. He hastened to the cupboard in which the magic balsams were kept, seized one of the phials of which he had often proved the efficacy, again mounted upon the trap, stamped his foot, and descended to the lower apartment.

Althotas rolled his armchair to the mouth of the trap, with the intention of seizing Balsamo by his garments. "Do you hear, unhappy man?" said he; "do you hear? If in a week I have not a child or a virgin to complete my elixir, I am a dead man!"

Balsamo turned; the old man's eyes seemed to glare in the midst of his unearthly and motionless features, as if they alone were alive. "Yes, yes," he replied, — "yes, be calm; you shall have what you want." He touched the spring, and the trap mounted again, fitting like an ornament in the ceiling of the room. Then he rushed into Lorenza's apartment, which he had just reached when Fritz's bell rang.

"Monsieur de Richelieu!" muttered Balsamo. "Oh! duke and peer as he is, he must wait."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MONSIEUR DE RICHELIEU'S TWO DROPS OF WATER.

MONSIEUR DE RICHELIEU left the house in the Rue Saint Claude at half-past four. What his errand with Balsamo was, will appear in what follows.

Monsieur de Taverney had dined with his daughter, as the dauphiness had given her leave to absent herself on this day in order that she might receive her father. They were at dessert, when Monsieur de Richelieu, ever the bearer of good news, made his appearance to announce to his friend that the king had declared that very morning that he would give not merely a company to Philippe, but a regiment. Taverney was exuberant in his expressions of joy, and Andrée warmly thanked the marshal.

The conversation took a turn which may be easily imagined after what had passed; Richelieu spoke of nothing but the king, Andrée of nothing but her brother, and Taverney of nothing but Andrée. The latter announced in the course of conversation that she was set at liberty from her attendance on the dauphiness; that her Royal Highness was receiving a visit from two German princes, her relations; and that in order to pass a few hours of liberty with them, which might remind her of the court of Vienna, Marie Antoinette had dismissed all her attendants, even her lady of honor, — which had so deeply shocked Madame de Noailles that she had gone to lay her grievances at the king's feet.

Taverney was, he said, delighted at this freedom of Andrée, since he had thus an opportunity of conversing with her about many things relating to their fortune and name. This observation made Richelieu propose to retire, in order to leave the father and daughter quite alone : but Mademoiselle de Taverney would not permit it : he therefore remained.

Richelieu was in a vein of moralizing ; he painted most eloquently the degradation into which the French nobility had fallen, forced as they were to submit to the ignominious yoke of those favorites of chance, those contraband queens, instead of burning incense to the favorites of the olden times, who were almost as noble as their august lovers, — women who reigned over the sovereign by their beauty and their love, and over his subjects by their rank, their strength of mind, and their loyal and pure patriotism.

Andrée was surprised at the close analogy between Richelieu's words and those she had heard from the Baron de Taverney a few days previously.

Richelieu then launched into a theory of virtue so spiritual, so pagan, so French that Andrée was obliged to confess that she was not at all virtuous according to Monsieur de Richelieu's theories, and that true virtue, as the marshal understood it, was the virtue of Madame de Châteauroux, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and Mademoiselle de Fosseuse.

From argument to argument, from proof to proof, Richelieu at last became so clear that Andrée no longer understood a word of what he said. On this footing the conversation continued until about seven o'clock in the evening, when the marshal rose, being obliged, as he said, to pay his court to the king at Versailles. In passing through the apartment to take his hat, he met Nicole, who had always something to do wherever Monsieur de Riche-

lieu was. "My girl," said he, tapping her on the shoulder, "you shall see me out. I want you to carry a bouquet which Madame de Noailles cut for me in her garden, and which she commissioned me to present to the Comtesse d'Egmont."

Nicole bowed like the peasant girls in Monsieur Rousseau's comic operas, whereupon the marshal took leave of father and daughter, exchanged a significant glance with Taverney, made a bow to Andrée which was quite juvenile in its graceful ease, and retired.

With the reader's permission we will leave the baron and Andrée conversing about the fresh mark of favor conferred on Philippe, and follow the marshal. In this way we shall discover what was his errand at the Rue Saint Claude, where he arrived at such a fearful moment. Besides, the moralizing of the baron even surpassed that of his friend the marshal, and might startle ears less pure than Andrée's, which would perhaps partly understand it.

Richelieu descended the stairs leaning on Nicole's shoulder; and as soon as they were in the garden he stopped, and looking her in the face said: "Ah! little one, so we have a lover?"

"I, Monsieur le Maréchal!" exclaimed Nicole, blushing crimson, and retreating a step.

"Oh! perhaps you are not called Nicole Legay?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Maréchal."

"Well, Nicole Legay has a lover."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, faith! a certain good-looking rascal whom she used to meet in the Rue Coq-Héron, and who has followed her to Versailles."

"Monsieur le Duc, I swear to you —"

"A sort of officer, called — Shall I tell you, child, the name of Mademoiselle Legay's lover?"

Nicole's last hope was that the marshal was ignorant of the name of that happy mortal.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur le Maréchal! tell me, since you have made a beginning."

"Who is called Monsieur de Beausire," repeated the marshal, "and who in truth does not belie his name."

Nicole clasped her hands with an affectation of prudery which did not in the least impose on Richelieu. "It seems," said he, "we make appointments with him at Trianon. *Peste!* in a royal chateau, — that is a serious matter. One may be discharged for these freaks, my sweet one; and Monsieur de Sartines sends all young ladies who are discharged from the royal chateau to the Salpêtrière."

Nicole began to be uneasy.

"Monseigneur," said she, "I swear to you that if Monsieur Beausire boasts of being my lover, he is a fool and a villain; for indeed I am innocent."

"I shall not contradict you," said Richelieu; "but have you made appointments with him, or not?"

"Monseigneur, a rendezvous is no proof of —"

"Have you, or have you not? Answer me."

"Monseigneur —"

"You have. Very well; I do not blame you, my dear child. Besides, I like pretty girls who make use of their attractions, and I have always assisted them in so doing to the utmost of my power. Only, as your friend and protector, I warn you."

"But have I been seen, then?" asked Nicole.

"It seems so, since I know about it."

"Monseigneur," said Nicole, resolutely, "I have not been seen; it is impossible!"

"As to that, I know nothing; but the report is very prevalent, and must tend to fasten attention on your mis-

tress. Now, you must be aware that being more the friend of the Taverneys than of the Legays, it is my duty to give the baron a hint."

"Oh, Monseigneur!" exclaimed Nicole, terrified at the turn the conversation was taking, "you will ruin me! Although innocent, I shall be discharged on the mere suspicion."

"Well, my poor child, you will be discharged, then; for even now some evil-minded person or other, having taken offence at these meetings, innocent though they be, has informed Madame de Noailles of them."

"Madame de Noailles, — good heavens!"

"Yes; you see the danger is urgent."

Nicole clasped her hands in despair.

"It is unfortunate, I am aware," said Richelieu; "but what the devil can you do about it?"

"And you, who said just now you were my protector, — you, who have proved yourself to be such, — can you no longer protect me?" asked Nicole, with a wheedling cunning worthy of a woman of thirty years.

"Yes, *pardieu!* I can protect you."

"Well, Monseigneur?"

"Yes; but I will not."

"Oh, Monsieur le Duc!"

"Yes, you are pretty, I know that, and your beautiful eyes say all sorts of things to me; but I have lately become rather blind, my poor Nicole, and I no longer understand the language of lovely eyes. Once I would have offered you an asylum in my pavilion of Hanovre; but now it would be of no use, — it is not even to be spoken of."

"Yet you have once already taken me there," said Nicole, angrily.

"Ah! that is ungrateful in you, Nicole, to reproach me

with having taken you there, when I did so to render you a service; for, confess that without Monsieur Rafté's assistance, who made you a charming brunette, you would never have entered Trianon, — which, after all, perhaps, would have been better than to be dismissed from it now. But why the devil did you give a rendezvous to Monsieur de Beausire, and at the very gate of the stables too?"

"So you know that also?" said Nicole, who saw that she must change her tactics, and place herself at the marshal's discretion.

"*Parbleu!* you see that I know it, and Madame de Noailles too. This very evening you have a rendezvous —"

"That is true, Monsieur le Duc; but, on my faith, I will not go."

"Of course, you are warned; but Monsieur de Beausire will go. He is not warned, and he will be seized. Then, as he will not like, of course, to be taken for a thief and be hanged, or for a spy and be whipped, he will prefer to say, — especially as there is no disgrace in confessing it, — 'Unhand me; I am the lover of the pretty Nicole!'"

"Monsieur le Duc, I will send to warn him."

"Impossible, my poor child! by whom could you send? By him who betrayed you, perhaps?"

"Alas! that is true," said Nicole, feigning despair.

"What a becoming thing remorse is!" exclaimed Richelieu.

Nicole covered her face with her hands, taking care, however, to leave space enough between her fingers to allow her to observe every look and gesture of Richelieu.

"You are really adorable!" said the duke, whom none of these little tricks could escape. "Why am I not fifty years younger? No matter, *parbleu!* Nicole, I will bring you out of the scrape."

"Oh, Monseigneur! if you do that, my gratitude —"

"I don't want it, Nicole. On the contrary, I shall give you most disinterested assistance."

"Oh, how good of you, Monseigneur! I thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

"Do not thank me yet; as yet you know nothing. What the devil! wait till you hear more."

"I will submit to anything, provided Mademoiselle Andrée does not dismiss me."

"Ah! then your heart is set on remaining at Trianon?"

"By all means, Monseigneur."

"Well, Nicole, in the very first place, get rid of this feeling."

"But why so, if I am not discovered, Monsieur le Duc?"

"Whether you are discovered or not, you must leave Trianon."

"Oh! why?"

"I will tell you: because if Madame de Noailles has found you out, no one, not even the king, can save you."

"Ah, if I could only see the king!"

"Well, really, little one, that indeed would be sufficient. In the second place, even if you are not found out, I myself shall cause your departure."

"You?"

"Immediately."

"In truth, Monsieur le Maréchal, I do not understand you."

"It is as I have had the honor of telling you."

"And that is your protection, is it?"

"If you do not wish for it, there is yet time; you have only to say the word, Nicole."

"Oh, yes, Monsieur le Duc! on the contrary, I do wish for it."

"And I will grant it."

"Well?"

"Well, this is what I will do for you. Hark ye!"

"Speak, Monseigneur!"

"Instead of getting you discharged, and perhaps imprisoned, I will make you free and rich."

"Free and rich?"

"Yes."

"And what must I do in order to be free and rich? Tell me quickly, Monsieur le Maréchal!"

"Almost nothing."

"But what —"

"What I am about to tell you."

"Is it difficult?"

"Mere child's play."

"Then," said Nicole, "there is something to do?"

"Ah, of course! you know the motto of the world, Nicole, — 'Nothing for nothing.'"

"And that which I have to do, is it for myself, or for you?"

The Duke looked at Nicole. "*Tudieu!*" said he; "the little masker, how cunning she is!"

"Well, finish, Monsieur le Duc."

"Well! it is for yourself," replied he, boldly.

"Ah!" said Nicole, who, perceiving that the marshal had need of her services, already feared him no longer, while her ingenious brain was busily endeavoring to discover the truth amid the windings which, from habit, her companion always used; "what shall I have to do for myself, Monsieur le Duc?"

"This: Monsieur de Beausire comes at half-past seven does he not?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Maréchal, that is his time."

"It is now ten minutes past seven."

"That is also true."

"If I say the word he will be arrested."

"Yes, but you will not say it."

"No. You will go to him and tell him. But in the first place, Nicole, do you love this young man?"

"Why, I have given him a rendezvous."

"That is no reason; you may wish to marry him. Women take such strange caprices."

Nicole burst into a loud laugh. "I marry him!" said she. "Ha! ha! ha!"

Richelieu was astounded: he had not, even at court, met many women of this stamp.

"Well," said he, "so be it. You do not wish to marry him, but you love him. So much the better."

"Agreed! I love Monsieur de Beausire. Let us take that for granted, Monseigneur, and proceed!"

"*Peste!* what strides you make!"

"Of course. You may readily imagine that I am anxious to know what remains for me to do."

"In the first place, since you love him, you must fly with him."

"Oh! if you absolutely insist upon it, I suppose I must."

"Oh, oh! I insist upon nothing; not so fast, little one."

Nicole saw that she was going too far, and that as yet she had neither the secret nor the money of her cunning opponent. She stooped, therefore, only to rise again afterward.

"Monseigneur," said she, "I await your orders."

"Well! you must go to Monsieur de Beausire and say to him: 'We are discovered; but I have a protector who will save you from Saint Lazare, and me from the Salpêtrière. Let us fly.'"

Nicole looked at Richelieu. "Fly?" she repeated.

Richelieu understood her cunning and expressive look. "*Parbleu!*" said he, "of course I shall pay the expenses."

Nicole asked for no further explanation. It was plain that she would know all, since she was to be paid.

The marshal saw what an important point Nicole had gained, and hastened to say all he had to say, just as a gambler is eager to pay when he has lost, in order to get through the disagreeable task.

"Do you know what you are thinking of, Nicole?" said he.

"Faith, no," replied the girl; "but I suppose you, Monsieur le Maréchal, who know so many things, have divined it."

"Nicole," he replied, "you were reflecting that if you fled, your mistress might require you during the night; and not finding you, might give the alarm, which would expose you to the risk of being overtaken and seized."

"No," said Nicole, "I was not thinking of that; because, on reflection, Monseigneur, I would prefer remaining here."

"But if Monsieur de Beausire is taken?"

"Well, I cannot help it."

"But if he confess?"

"Let him confess."

"Ah!" said Richelieu, beginning to be uneasy, "but in that case you are lost."

"No; for Mademoiselle Andrée is kindness itself, and as she loves me at heart, she will speak to the king for me. So, even if Monsieur de Beausire is punished, I shall not share his punishment."

The marshal bit his lips.

"Nicole," said he, "I tell you you are a fool. Mademoiselle Andrée is not on good terms with the king, and

I will have you arrested immediately if you do not listen to me as I wish. Do you hear, you little viper?"

"Oh, oh! Monseigneur, my head is neither flat nor horned. I listen, but I form my own conclusions."

"Good! Then you will go at once and arrange your plan of flight with Monsieur de Beausire."

"But how? Do you imagine, Monsieur le Maréchal, that I shall expose myself to the risk of flight, when you tell me yourself that Mademoiselle might awake, might ask for me, give the alarm, and a great deal more which I did not think of, but which you, Monseigneur, who are a man of experience, have foreseen?"

Richelieu bit his lip again; but this time more deeply than before. "Well, you rogue," said he, "if I have thought of these consequences, I have also thought of how to avoid them."

"And how will you manage to prevent Mademoiselle from calling me?"

"By preventing her awaking."

"Bah! she awakes ten times during the night; impossible!"

"Then she has the same malady that I have?" said Richelieu, calmly.

"The same that you have?" said Nicole, laughing.

"Yes. I also awake ten times every night, only I have a remedy for this sleeplessness. She must do as I do, or if not, you must do it for her."

"What do you mean, Monseigneur."

"What does your mistress take in the evening before she goes to bed?"

"What does she take?"

"Yes, it is the fashion now to guard thus against thirst. Some take orangeade or lemonade; others eau-de-mélisse; others —"

"Mademoiselle drinks only a glass of pure water in the evening before going to bed, — sometimes sweetened and flavored with orange-water, if her nerves are weak."

"Ah, excellent!" said Richelieu; "just as I do myself. My remedy will suit her admirably."

"How so?"

"I pour one drop of a certain liquid into my beverage, and I then sleep all night."

Nicole tasked her brain to discover to what end the marshal's diplomacy tended.

"You do not answer?" said he.

"I was just thinking that Mademoiselle has not your cordial."

"I will give you some."

"Ah!" thought Nicole, seeing at last a ray of light through the darkness.

"You must put two drops of it in your mistress's glass, — neither more nor less, remember; and she will sleep soundly, so that she will not call you, and consequently you will have time to escape."

"Oh! if that is all, it is very simple."

"You will give her the two drops?"

"Certainly."

"You promise me?"

"I presume it is for my own interest to do so; besides, I will lock the door so carefully —"

"By no means," said Richelieu, hastily; "that is exactly what you must not do. On the contrary, you must leave the door of her chamber open."

"Ah!" exclaimed Nicole, with an inward illumination; she now understood all. Richelieu saw it plainly. "Is that all?" she inquired.

"Absolutely all. Now you may go and tell your soldier to pack up his trunks."

"Unfortunately, Monsieur, it would be useless to tell him to fill his purse."

"You know that is my affair."

"Yes, I remember your lordship was kind enough to say — "

"Come, Nicole, how much do you want?"

"For what?"

"For pouring out those two drops of water."

"For that, nothing, Monseigneur, since you assure me I pour them out for my own advantage; it would not be just that you should pay me for attending to my own interest. But for leaving Mademoiselle's door open, — ah! for that, I warn you, I must have a good round sum."

"In one word, how much?"

"I must have twenty thousand francs, Monseigneur."

Richelieu started. "Nicole," said he, with a sigh, "you will go far."

"I ought to do so, Monseigneur, for I begin to believe, with you, that they will pursue me; but with your twenty thousand francs I shall make the journey."

"Go and warn Monsieur de Beausire, Nicole; and when you return, I will give you the money."

"Monseigneur, Monsieur de Beausire is very incredulous, and he will not believe what I tell him, unless I can give him proofs."

Richelieu pulled out a handful of bank-notes from his pocket. "Here is something on account," said he; "and in this purse there are a hundred double louis."

"Monseigneur will settle the account in full and give me the balance then when I have spoken to Monsieur de Beausire?"

"No, *pardieu!* I will settle it on the spot. You are a careful girl, Nicole; it will bring you good fortune."

And Richelieu handed her the promised sum, partly in bank-notes, and partly in louis-d'or and half-louis.

"There!" said he; "is that right?"

"I think so," said Nicole. "And now, Monseigneur, I want only the principal thing."

"The cordial?"

"Yes; of course your lordship has a flask?"

"I have my own, which I always carry about with me."

Nicole smiled. "And then," said she, "Trianon is locked every night, and I have not a key."

"But I have one, as first gentleman of the chamber."

"Ah, really?"

"Here it is."

"How fortunate all this is!" said Nicole; "it is one succession of miracles. And now, Monsieur le Duc, adieu!"

"Why adieu?"

"Certainly. I shall not see your lordship again, since I shall go as soon as Mademoiselle is asleep."

"Quite right. Adieu, then, Nicole!"

And Nicole, laughing in her sleeve, disappeared in the increasing darkness.

"I shall still succeed," said Richelieu. "But in truth it would seem that I am getting old, and fortune is turning against me. I have been outwitted by this little one. But what matters it, if I return the blow!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FLIGHT.

Nicole was a conscientious girl. She had received Monsieur de Richelieu's money, and received it in advance too; and she felt anxious to prove herself worthy of this confidence by earning her pay. She ran, therefore, as quickly as possible to the gate, where she arrived at forty minutes past seven, instead of at half-past. Now, Monsieur de Beausire, who, being accustomed to military discipline, was a punctual man, had been waiting there for ten minutes. About ten minutes before, too, Monsieur de Taverney had left his daughter, and Andrée was consequently alone. Now, being alone, the young girl had closed the blinds.

Gilbert, as usual, was gazing eagerly at Andrée from his attic; but it would have been difficult to say whether his eyes sparkled with love or with hatred. When the blinds were closed, Gilbert could see nothing. Consequently, he looked in another direction; and thus looking, he perceived Monsieur de Beausire's plume, and recognized the officer, who was walking up and down, whistling an air to kill time while he was waiting.

In about ten minutes — that is to say, at forty minutes past seven — Nicole made her appearance. She exchanged a few words with Monsieur de Beausire, who made a gesture with his head as a sign that he understood her, and disappeared by the shady alley which led to

Petit Trianon. Nicole, light as a bird, returned in the direction from which she had come.

"Oh, oh!" thought Gilbert. "Monsieur the officer, and Mademoiselle the waiting-maid, have something to do or to say which they fear to have witnessed. Very good!"

Gilbert no longer felt any interest in respect to Nicole's movements; but actuated by the idea that the young girl was his natural enemy, he merely sought to collect a mass of proofs against her morality, with which he might successfully repulse any attack, should she attempt one against him. And as he knew the campaign might begin at any moment, like a prudent soldier he collected his munitions of war.

A rendezvous with a man in the very grounds of Trianon was one of the weapons which a cunning enemy such as Gilbert could not neglect, especially when it was imprudently placed under his very eyes. He consequently wished to have the testimony of his ears as well as that of his eyes, and to catch some fatally compromising phrase which would completely floor Nicole at the first onset. He quickly descended from his attic, therefore, hastened along the passage-way, and gained the garden by the chapel stairs. Once in the garden, he had nothing to fear, for he knew all its hiding-places as a fox knows his cover. He glided beneath the linden-trees, then along the espalier, until he reached a small thicket situated about twenty paces from the spot where he counted upon seeing Nicole. As he had foreseen, Nicole was there. Scarcely had he installed himself in the thicket when a strange noise reached his ears. It was the chink of gold upon stone, — that metallic sound of which nothing except the reality can give a correct idea.

Like a serpent Gilbert glided along to a raised terrace,

surmounted by a hedge of lilacs, which at that season (early in May) diffused their perfume around, and showered down their flowers upon those who took the shady alley on their way from Grand to Petit Trianon.

Having reached this retreat, Gilbert, whose eyes were accustomed to pierce the darkness, saw Nicole emptying the purse, which Monsieur de Richelieu had given her, upon a stone on the inner side of the gate, and prudently placed out of Monsieur de Beausire's reach. The large louis-d'or came forth from it in bright profusion, while Monsieur de Beausire, with sparkling eye and trembling hand, looked at Nicole and her louis-d'or as if he could not comprehend how the one should possess the other.

Nicole spoke first. "You have more than once, my dear Monsieur de Beausire," said she, "proposed to elope with me."

"And even to marry you," exclaimed the enthusiastic officer.

"Oh, my dear Monsieur! that is a matter of course; just now flight is the most important point. Can we fly in two hours?"

"In ten minutes, if you like."

"No; I have something to do first, which will occupy me two hours."

"In two hours, as in ten minutes, I shall be at your orders, my love."

"Very well. Take these fifty louis." Nicole counted out the fifty louis, and handed them through the gate to Monsieur de Beausire, who, without counting them, stuffed them into his waistcoat pocket. "And in an hour and a half," she continued, "be here with a carriage."

"But —" objected Beausire.

"Oh! if you do not wish, forget what has passed between us, and give me back my fifty louis."

"I do not shrink, dear Nicole, but I fear the future."

"For whom?"

"For you."

"For me?"

"Yes; the fifty louis once vanished, — and vanished they will soon be, — you will complain, you will regret Trianon, you will — "

"Oh, how thoughtful you are, dear Monsieur de Beausire! But fear nothing; I am not one of those women who are easily made miserable. Have no scruples on that score; when the fifty louis are gone, we shall see;" and she shook the purse which contained the other fifty.

Beausire's eyes were absolutely phosphorescent. "I would charge through a blazing furnace for your sake!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, well, well, I shall not require so much from you, Monsieur de Beausire! Then it is agreed that you will be here with the chaise in an hour and a half, and in two hours we will fly?"

"Agreed!" exclaimed Beausire, seizing Nicole's hand, and drawing it through the gate to kiss it.

"Hush!" said Nicole, "are you mad?"

"No, I am in love."

"Hum!" muttered Nicole.

"Do you not believe me, sweetheart?"

"Yes, yes, I believe you. Above all, be sure to have good horses."

"Oh, yes!"

They separated. But a moment afterward Beausire returned, quite alarmed. "Hist!" he whispered.

"Well, what is it?" asked Nicole, already some distance off, and putting her hand to her mouth, so as to convey her voice farther.

"And the gate?" asked Beausire; "will you creep under it."

"How stupid he is!" murmured Nicole, who at this moment was not ten paces distant from Gilbert. Then she added in a louder tone, "I have the key."

Beausire uttered a prolonged "oh!" of admiration, and this time took to his heels for good. Nicole hastened back with drooping head and nimble step to her mistress.

Gilbert, now left sole master of the field, put the following four questions to himself:—

"Why does Nicole fly with Beausire, when she does not love him?

"How does Nicole come to possess such a large sum of money?

"Why has Nicole the key of the gate?

"Why does Nicole return to Andrée when she might go at once?"

Gilbert found an answer to the second question, but to the others he could find none. Thus checked at the outset, his natural curiosity and his acquired distrust were so much excited that he determined to remain in the cold, beneath the dew-covered trees, to await the end of this scene, of which he had witnessed the beginning.

Andrée had conducted her father to the barriers of Grand Trianon, and was returning alone and pensive, when Nicole appeared issuing from the alley leading to the famous gate where she had been concerting her measures with Monsieur Beausire.

Nicole stopped on perceiving her mistress, and upon a sign which Andrée made to her, she followed her to her apartment. It was now about half-past eight in the evening. The night had closed in earlier than usual; for a huge cloud, sweeping from south to north, had overspread the whole sky, and all around, as far as the eye

could reach over the lofty forest of Versailles, the gloomy shroud was gradually enveloping in its folds the stars, a short time before sparkling in the azure dome. A light breeze swept along the ground, breathing warmly on the drooping flowers, which bent their heads, as if imploring heaven to send them rain or dew.

The threatening aspect of the sky did not hasten Andrée's steps; on the contrary, melancholy and thoughtful, the young girl seemed to ascend each step leading to her room with regret, and she paused at every window as she passed, to gaze at the sky, so much in harmony with her saddened mood, and thus to delay her return to her own little retreat.

Nicole, impatient, angry, fearing that some whim might detain her mistress beyond the usual hour, grumbled and muttered, as servants never fail to do when their masters are imprudent enough to satisfy their own caprices at the expense of those of their domestics.

At last Andrée reached the door of her chamber, and sank rather than seated herself upon a couch, gently ordering Nicole to leave the window, which looked upon the court, half-open. Nicole obeyed; then, returning to her mistress with that affectionate air which the flatterer could so easily assume, she said: "I fear Mademoiselle feels ill this evening; her eyes are red and swollen, yet bright. I think that Mademoiselle is in great need of repose."

"Do you think so?" asked Andrée, who had scarcely listened; and she carelessly placed her feet upon a cushion of tapestry-work.

Nicole took this as an order to undress her mistress, and began to unfasten the ribbons and flowers of her headdress, — a species of edifice which the most skilful could not demolish in less than a quarter of an hour. While she was thus employed, Andrée did not utter a word; and

Nicole, left to follow her own wishes, did her work rapidly, without disturbing Andrée, whose preoccupation was so great that she permitted Nicole to pull out her hair with impunity.

When the night-toilet was finished, Andrée gave her orders for the morrow. In the morning some books were to be brought from Versailles which Philippe had left there for his sister, and the tuner was to be ordered to attend to put the harpsichord in proper order.

Nicole replied that if she were not called during the night, she would rise early, and would have both these commissions executed before her young lady was awake.

"To-morrow also I will write to Philippe," said Andrée, speaking to herself; "that will console me a little."

"Come what will," thought Nicole, "I shall not carry the letter."

And at this reflection the girl, who was not quite lost yet, began to think, in saddened mood, that she was about for the first time to leave that excellent mistress under whose care her mind and heart had been awakened. The thought of Andrée was linked in her mind with so many other recollections that to touch it was to stir the whole chain which carried her back to the first days of infancy.

While these two young creatures, so different in their character and their condition, were thus reflecting beside each other, without any connection existing between their thoughts, time was rapidly flying, and Andrée's little time-piece, which was always in advance of the great clock of Trianon, struck nine. Beausire would be at the appointed place, and Nicole had but half an hour to join her lover. She finished her task as quickly as possible, not without uttering some sighs, which Andrée did not even notice. She folded a night-shawl around her mistress, and as Andrée still sat immovable, with her eyes fixed on the

ceiling, she drew Richelieu's phial from her bosom, put two pieces of sugar into a goblet, added the water necessary to melt it, and without hesitation, and by the resolute force of her will, so strong in one so young, she poured two drops of the fluid from the phial into the water, which immediately became turbid, then changed to a slight opal tint, which soon died away.

"Mademoiselle," said Nicole, "your glass of water is prepared, your clothes are folded, the night-lamp is lighted. You know I must rise very early to-morrow morning: may I go to bed now?"

"Yes," replied Andrée, absently.

Nicole made her reverence, heaved a last sigh, which, like the others, was unnoticed, and closed behind her the glass-door leading to the ante-room. But instead of retiring into her little cell adjoining the corridor and lighted from Andrée's ante-room, she softly took to flight, leaving the door of the corridor ajar, so that Richelieu's instructions were scrupulously followed. Then, not to arouse the attention of the neighbors, she descended the stairs on tiptoe, bounded down the outer steps, and ran quickly to join Monsieur de Beausire at the gate.

Gilbert had not left his post of observation. He had heard Nicole say that she would return in two hours, and he waited. But as it was now ten minutes past the appointed time, he began to fear that she would not return. Suddenly he saw her running, as if some one were pursuing her.

Nicole approached the gate, passed the key through the bars to Beausire, who opened it; she rushed out, and the gate closed with a dull, grating noise. The key was then thrown into the grass in the ditch, near the spot where Gilbert was stationed. He heard it fall with a dead sound, and marked the place where it had dropped.

Nicole and Beausire in the mean time gained ground. Gilbert heard them move away; and soon he could distinguish, not the noise of a carriage, as Nicole had required, but the pawing of a horse, which, after some moments' delay, — occupied doubtless by Nicole in recrimination, who had wished to depart, like a duchess, in her carriage, — changed to the clattering of his iron-shod feet on the pavement, and at last died away in the distance.

Gilbert breathed freely; he was free, free from Nicole, — that is to say, from his enemy. Andrée was alone. Perhaps in taking flight Nicole had left the key in the door; perhaps he could penetrate to Andrée's chamber. This idea excited the impetuous young man to a frenzy of fear and doubt, of curiosity and desire. He took the direction contrary to that which Nicole was pursuing, and hurried toward the offices of Trianon.

CHAPTER XX.

DOUBLE SIGHT.

When Andrée was alone, she gradually recovered from the mental torpor into which she had fallen; and while Nicole was flying *en croupe* behind Monsieur de Beausire, she knelt down and offered up a fervent prayer for Philippe, the only being in the world she loved with a true and deep attachment; and while she prayed, her trust in God assumed new strength, and inspired her with fresh courage.

The prayers which Andrée offered were not composed of a succession of words strung one to the other, they were uttered in a kind of heavenly ecstasy, during which her soul rose to her God and mingled with his spirit.

In these impassioned supplications of the mind freed from earthly concerns, there was no alloy of self. Andrée in some degree abandoned herself, like a shipwrecked mariner who has lost hope, and who prays no longer for himself, but only for his wife and children, soon to become orphans. This inward grief had sprung up in Andrée's bosom since her brother's departure; but it was not entirely without another cause. Like her prayer, it was composed of two distinct elements, one of which was quite inexplicable to her. It was, as it were, a presentiment, — the perceptible approach of some impending misfortune. It was a sensation resembling that of darting pains in a cicatrized wound. The continuous pain is over, but the remembrance of it survives, and reminds the

sufferer of the calamity, as the wound itself had previously done.

Andrée did not even attempt to explain her feelings to herself. Devoted heart and soul to Philippe, she centred in her beloved brother her every thought and every affection. Then she rose, took a book from her modestly furnished library, placed the light within reach of her hand, and lay down on the bed. The book she had chosen, or rather upon which she had accidentally placed her hand, was a dictionary of botany. It may readily be imagined that this book was not calculated to absorb her attention; on the contrary, it made her sleepy. Gradually drowsiness weighed down her eyelids, and a filmy veil obscured her vision. For a moment the young girl struggled against sleep; twice or thrice she collected her scattered thoughts, which soon escaped again from her control; then, raising her head to blow out the candle, she perceived the glass of water prepared by Nicole, stretched out her hand and took the glass, stirred the sugar with the spoon, and, already half-asleep, she raised the glass to her lips.

Suddenly, just as her lips were already touching the beverage, a strange emotion made her hand tremble, a moist and burning weight fell on her brow, and Andrée recognized with terror, by the current of the fluid which rushed through her nerves, that supernatural attack of mysterious sensations which had several times already triumphed over her strength and overpowered her mind. She had only time to place the glass upon the plate, when instantly, without a murmur, but with a sigh which escaped from her half-open lips, she lost the use of voice, sight, and reason, and seized with a death-like torpor, fell back, as if struck by lightning, upon her bed. But this quasi-annihilation was but the momentary transition to

another state of existence. For a moment she seemed lifeless, and her eyes were apparently closed in the slumber of death; but suddenly she rose, opened her eyes, which stared with a fearful fixity of gaze, and stepped down from her bed to the floor, like a marble statue descending from a tomb.

There was no longer room for doubt. Andrée was sunk in that marvellous sleep which had several times already suspended her vital functions. She crossed the chamber, opened the glass-door, and entered the corridor with the fixed and rigid attitude of breathing marble. She reached the stairs, descended step by step without hesitation and without haste, and emerged upon the portico. Just as Andrée placed her foot upon the topmost step to descend, Gilbert reached the lowest on his way up. Seeing this white and solemn figure advancing as if to meet him, he recoiled before her, and, still retreating as she advanced, he concealed himself in a clump of shrubs. It was thus, he recollected, that he had already seen Andrée de Taverney at the Château of Taverney.

Andrée passed close by him, even touched him, but did not see him. The young man, thunderstruck, speechless with surprise, sank to the ground on one knee. His limbs refused to support him, — he was afraid. Not knowing to what cause to attribute this strange excursion, he followed her with his eyes; but his reason was confounded, his blood beat impetuously against his temples, and he was in a state nearer to madness than to the coolness and circumspection necessary for an observer.

Gilbert remained, therefore, crouching on the grass among the leaves, watching, as he had never ceased to do since this fatal attachment had entered his heart. Immediately the mystery was explained: Andrée was neither mad nor bewildered, as he had for a moment supposed;

Andrée, with this slow, sepulchral step, was going to a rendezvous. A gleam of lightning now furrowed the sky, and by its blue and livid light Gilbert saw a man concealed beneath the sombre avenue of linden-trees; and notwithstanding the rapidity of the flash, he had recognized the pale face and disordered garments of the man relieved against the dark background. Andrée advanced toward this man, whose arm was extended as if to draw her to him.

A sensation like the branding of a red-hot iron rushed through Gilbert's heart; he raised himself upon his knees to see more clearly. At that moment another flash of lightning illumined the sky. He recognized Balsamo, covered with dust and perspiration, — Balsamo, who by some mysterious means had succeeded in entering Trianon, and thus drew Andrée toward him as invincibly, as fatally, as the serpent fascinates its prey.

When two paces from him Andrée stopped. Balsamo took her hand; her whole frame shuddered.

"Do you see?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Andrée; "but in summoning me so suddenly, you have nearly killed me."

"Pardon, pardon!" replied Balsamo; "but my brain reels, I am beside myself, I am nearly mad, I am dying."

"You are indeed suffering," said Andrée, conscious of Balsamo's feelings by the contact of his hand.

"Yes, yes," replied Balsamo; "I suffer, and I come to you for consolation. You alone can save me."

"Question me."

"Once more, do you see?"

"Oh! perfectly."

"Will you follow me to my house? Can you do so?"

"I can, if you will conduct me there in thought."

"Come!"

"Ah!" said Andrée, "we are entering Paris; we follow the boulevard, we plunge into a street lighted by a single lamp."

"Yes, that is it. Enter, enter!"

"We are in an antechamber. There is a staircase to the right, but you draw me toward the wall. The wall opens; steps appear —"

"Ascend!" exclaimed Balsamo; "that is our way."

"Ah! we are in a sleeping-chamber; there are lions' skins, arms — Stay, the back of the fireplace opens."

"Pass through: where are you?"

"In a strange sort of room, without any outlet, and the windows of which are barred. Oh! how disordered everything in the room appears."

"But empty, — it is empty is it not?"

"Yes, empty."

"Can you see the person who inhabited it?"

"Yes, if you give me something which has touched her, which comes from her, or which belongs to her."

"Hold! there is some of her hair."

Andrée took the hair and placed it on her heart. "Oh! I recognize her," said she; "I have already seen this woman. She was flying toward Paris."

"Yes, yes; can you tell me what she has been doing during the last two hours, and how she escaped?"

"Wait a moment; yes, — she is reclining upon a sofa; her breast is half bared, and she has a wound on one side."

"Look, Andrée, look! do not lose sight of her."

"She was asleep; she awakes, she looks around; she takes a handkerchief and climbs upon a chair. She ties the handkerchief to the bars of the window — oh! my God!"

"She is really determined to die, then?"

"Oh, yes! she is resolute. But this sort of death terrifies her. She leaves the handkerchief tied to the bars; she descends — ah! poor woman!"

"What?"

"Oh! how she weeps, how she suffers, and wrings her hands! She searches for a corner of the wall against which to dash her head!"

"Oh, my God! my God!" murmured Balsamo.

"She rushes toward the chimney-piece! It represents two marble lions: she will dash out her brains against the lions!"

"What then? Look, Andrée, look; I will it!"

"She stops."

Balsamo breathed again.

"She looks— "

"What does she look at?" asked Balsamo.

"She has perceived some blood upon the lion's eye."

"Oh, heavens!"

"Yes, blood, and yet she did not strike herself against it. Oh, strange! the blood is not hers, it is yours."

"Mine?" asked Balsamo, frantic with excitement.

"Yes, yours. You had cut your finger with a knife, with a poniard — and had touched the lion's eye with your bleeding hand. I see you."

"True, true. But how does she escape?"

"Stay, I see her examining the blood; she reflects; then she places her finger where you had placed yours. Ah! the lion's eye gives way; a spring acts; the chimney slab swings open!"

"Oh! imprudent, wretched fool that I am, — I have betrayed myself!"

Andrée was silent.

"And she leaves the room?" asked Balsamo; "she escapes?"

"Oh! you must forgive the poor woman; she was very miserable."

"Where is she? Whither does she fly? Follow her, Andrée; I will it."

"She stops for a moment in the chamber of furs and armor; a closet is open; a casket, usually locked in this closet, is upon the table; she recognizes the box; she takes it."

"What does the box contain?"

"Your papers, I think."

"Describe it."

"It is covered with blue velvet, and studded with brass nails, — has clasps of silver, and a silver lock."

"Oh!" exclaimed Balsamo, stamping with anger, "it is she, then, who has taken the casket?"

"Yes. She descends the stairs leading into the anteroom, opens the door, draws back the chain of the street-door, and goes out."

"Is it late?"

"It must be late, for it is dark."

"So much the better; she must have fled shortly before my return, and I shall perhaps have time to overtake her. Follow her, Andrée; follow her!"

"Once outside the house, she runs as if she were mad; she reaches the boulevard; she hastens on without pausing."

"In which direction?"

"Toward the Bastille."

"You see her yet?"

"Yes; she looks like a madwoman; she jostles against the passers-by. At length she stops; she endeavors to discover where she is; she inquires."

"What does she say? Listen, Andrée, listen; in Heaven's name do not lose a syllable! You say she inquires?"

"Yes, she addresses a man dressed in black."

"What does she ask?"

"She wishes to know the address of the lieutenant of police."

"Oh! then it was not a vain threat. Does the person give it her?"

"Yes."

"What does she do?"

"She retraces her steps and turns down a winding street. She crosses a large square."

"The Place Royale, — it is the direct way. Can you read her intention?"

"Follow her quickly; hasten! She goes to betray you! If she arrives before you, and sees Monsieur de Sartines, you are lost!"

Balsamo uttered a terrible cry, plunged into the thicket, rushed through a little door which a shadowy apparition opened and closed after him, and leaped with one bound on his faithful Djerid, who was pawing the ground at the little gate. The animal, urged on at once by voice and spur, darted like an arrow toward Paris; and soon nothing was heard but the clattering of his hoofs on the paved causeway.

As for Andrée, she remained standing there, cold, mute, and pale. Then, as if Balsamo had borne away with him life and strength, she tottered, drooped, and fell. Balsamo, in his eagerness to follow Lorenza, had forgotten to awaken her.

CHAPTER XXI.

CATALEPSY.

As we have said, Andrée did not sink all at once, but gradually, in the manner we will attempt to describe.

Alone, abandoned, overpowered with that interior coldness which succeeds any violent nervous shock, Andrée began to tremble and totter like one seized by an epileptic fit. Gilbert still remained in the same place, — rigid, immovable, leaning forward, and devouring her with his gaze. But as it may readily be imagined, Gilbert, entirely ignorant of magnetic phenomena, thought neither of sleep nor of subjected will. He had heard nothing, or almost nothing, of her dialogue with Balsamo. But for the second time, at Trianon as at Taverney, Andrée had appeared to obey the summons of this man, who had acquired such a strange and terrible power over her. To Gilbert, therefore, the situation was summed up in these words: "Mademoiselle Andrée has, if not a lover, at least a man whom she loves, and to whom she grants a rendezvous at night."

The dialogue which had taken place between Andrée and Balsamo, although sustained in a low voice, had all the appearance of a quarrel. Balsamo, excited, flying, frantic, seemed like a lover in despair; Andrée, left alone, mute and motionless, like a loving girl abandoned. It was at this moment that he saw the young girl totter, wring her hands, and turn around bewildered. Then she uttered dull groans that seemed to rend her burdened heart. She

endeavored, or rather Nature endeavored, to throw back the overpowering mass of fluid which, during the magnetic sleep, had endowed her with that double sight whose phenomena we saw manifested in the last chapter.

But Nature was overpowered; Andrée could not succeed in throwing off the bonds of that mysterious will which Balsamo had forgotten to withdraw. She could not loose the marvellous, inexplicable ties which had bound her hand and foot; and by dint of struggling, she fell into those convulsions which in the olden time the Pythoness suffered upon her tripod before the crowd of religious questioners who swarmed around the peristyle of the temple.

Andrée lost her balance, and with a moan of pain sank toward the ground as if she had been struck by the flash which at that moment furrowed the vault of heaven. But she had not yet touched the earth when Gilbert, strong and agile as a tiger, darted toward her, seized her in his arms, and without being conscious that he carried a burden, bore her back into the chamber which she had left to obey Balsamo's summons, and in which the candle was yet burning beside the disarranged couch.

Gilbert found all the doors open as Andrée had left them. As he entered, he stumbled against the sofa, and placed on it the cold and inanimate form of the young girl. His contact with that lifeless frame had stirred a fever within him; his nerves quivered, his blood boiled. His first thought, however, was chaste and pure. It was necessary, first of all, to recall this beautiful statue to life. He looked round for the carafe, in order to sprinkle some drops of water in Andrée's face. But just as his trembling hand was stretched forth to grasp the thin neck of the crystal ewer, it seemed to him that a firm but light step sounded on the stairs leading to Andrée's chamber. It

could not be Nicole, for Nicole had fled with Monsieur de Beausire; it could not be Balsamo, for Balsamo was spurring with lightning haste to Paris. It must therefore be a stranger. Gilbert, if discovered, was lost; Andrée was to him like one of those princesses of Spain whom a subject may not touch, even to save from death.

All these ideas rushed like a whirlwind through Gilbert's mind in less time than that fatal step required to mount another stair. He could not calculate the exact distance of the footstep, which every moment approached still nearer, for the storm which raged without dulled every other sound; but gifted with extraordinary coolness and foresight, the young man understood that that was no place for him, and that the most important matter was to conceal himself from sight. He hastily blew out the candle which illumined Andrée's apartment, and entered the cabinet which served as Nicole's sleeping-chamber. From this hiding-place he could see through the glass-door into Andrée's apartment, and also into the antechamber.

In this antechamber a night-lamp was burning upon a little table. Gilbert had at first thought of extinguishing it, as he had extinguished the candle; but he had not time. The step creaked in the corridor, a repressed breathing was heard, the figure of a man appeared upon the threshold, glided timidly into the antechamber, closed the door, and bolted it.

Gilbert had only time to hasten into Nicole's cabinet and to close the glass-door after him. He held his breath, pressed his face against the stained-glass panes, and listened eagerly.

The storm still howled wildly outside, large rain-drops beat against the windows of Andrée's apartment and those of the corridor, where a casement, accidentally left open,

creaked upon its hinges, and every now and then, dashed back by the wind which rushed into the corridor, struck noisily against its frame.

But the war of the elements, terrible as it was, produced no effect on Gilbert. His whole soul was concentrated in his gaze, which was riveted upon this man, who crossed the antechamber, passed not two paces distant from Gilbert, and unhesitatingly entered the chamber.

Gilbert saw the man advance, feeling his way, to Andrée's bed, make a gesture of surprise on seeing the bed unoccupied, and almost immediately jostle with his arm the candle upon the table. The candle fell, and Gilbert heard the crystal socket break in falling on the marble table. Then the man called twice in a subdued voice, "Nicole! Nicole!"

"What, Nicole!" thought Gilbert, in his hiding-place. "Why does this man call Nicole instead of Andrée?"

But as no voice replied to his, the man lifted the candle from the floor, and proceeded on tiptoe to light it at the night-lamp in the antechamber. It was then that Gilbert fixed his whole attention upon this strange nocturnal visitor; he gazed as if his vision could have pierced the wall. Suddenly he trembled, and even in his hiding-place recoiled a step.

By the light of the two flames combined, Gilbert, trembling and half-dead with affright, recognized in this man who held the candle in his hand — the king!

Then all was explained, — Nicole's flight, the money she had given Beausire, the door left open, the interviews between Richelieu and Taverney, and all that dark and mysterious intrigue of which the young girl was the centre.

Then Gilbert understood why the king had called Nicole, the instrument of that crime, the complaisant

Judas who had sold and delivered up her mistress! But at the thought of the king's purpose in coming to that chamber, at the thought of what was about to take place before him, the blood rushed to his eyes and blinded him. He had the impulse to cry out; but fear, that unreflecting, capricious, irresistible sentiment, — the fear he had of that man, still full of prestige, who was called the king of France, tied his tongue.

Louis XV. meanwhile had returned to the chamber, candle in hand. Immediately he saw Andrée, in a robe of white muslin which left her person partially uncovered, her head leaning against the back of the sofa, one leg resting on the cushion, and the other, inflexible and bare, resting on the carpet. At that sight the king smiled. The candle lighted up that sinister smile; but almost at the same time a smile equally sinister appeared on Andrée's face. Louis XV. murmured a few words, which Gilbert understood to be words of love, and placing his light on the table, glancing as he turned at the illumined sky, he went and knelt down before the young girl and kissed her hand.

Gilbert wiped away the perspiration coursing down his face. Andrée did not stir.

The king, perceiving that Andrée's hand was cold, took it in his own to warm it, and passing his other arm around that body so beautiful and so sweet, he leaned forward to murmur in her ear some of that fond nonsense which is breathed sometimes in the ears of young girls asleep. At that moment his face approached Andrée's so closely as to touch it lightly.

Gilbert felt in his pocket, and breathed more freely as he grasped the handle of a long knife which he was wont to use in trimming the trees of the park.

The king found Andrée's face as cold as her hand. He

rose to his feet. His eyes fell on Andrée's naked foot, white and small as that of Cinderella. He took it between his hands; it was as cold as that of a marble statue. The king was startled.

Gilbert, gazing upon the charms of that beauteous, unveiled form, and feeling as if the threatened crime was about to be committed against himself, ground his teeth and opened the knife, which until then he had held closed in his hand.

But the king had already abandoned Andrée's foot, as he had abandoned her hand and her face, and, surprised by the young girl's sleep, which at first he had ascribed to a coquettish prudery, he sought to account for the deathly coldness which had seized upon the extremities of that lovely body; he asked himself if the heart could still beat when hand, foot, and face were so cold. He parted, therefore, Andrée's robe, exposing her virginal breast, and with a touch at once timid and cynical he questioned the heart, silent beneath that flesh, cold as alabaster, and as white and firm in its rounded form.

Gilbert glided half through the doorway, with his knife in his hand, his eyes flashing, his teeth pressed together, determined, should the king continue his enterprises, to stab him and then to stab himself.

Just then a fearful peal of thunder made every article of furniture in the room shake, even to the couch before which Louis was kneeling. A livid and sulphureous flash of lightning threw so dazzling a light over Andrée's countenance that Louis, alarmed at her paleness, her motionless attitude, and her silence, started back, murmuring: "This girl is surely dead!"

At the same instant the idea of having kissed a corpse sent an icy chill through the king's veins. He seized the candle, held it close to Andrée's face, and hastily examined her features by the light of the trembling flame.

Beholding her livid lips, her swollen and discolored eyes, her dishevelled hair, her chest which no breath stirred, he uttered a cry, let the light fall, staggered back, and reeled like a drunken man into the ante-room, against the walls of which he stumbled in his alarm. His hasty step sounded upon the stairs, then on the gravel walks of the garden, and was soon lost in the howling storm which raged through the long alleys and shady groves of Trianon.

Then Gilbert, silent and gloomy, still holding his knife, went out from his hiding-place. He advanced to the threshold of Andrée's chamber, and for several seconds looked at the young girl buried in her deep sleep. Meanwhile the candle dropped by the king was still burning, overturned upon the carpet, and threw its light on the delicate foot and the marble limbs of that adorable body.

Gilbert slowly closed his knife, while his face gradually assumed the expression of an inexorable resolution ; then he went to listen at the door by which the king had departed. He listened more than a full minute. Then he, as the king had done, closed the door and pushed home the bolt. Then he blew out the light in the antechamber. Finally, with the same deliberation, with the same sombre fire in his eyes, he returned to Andrée's chamber and put his foot on the candle, still wasting on the carpet. A sudden darkness obscured the fatal smile which hovered on his lips. "Andrée, Andrée!" he murmured, "I promised you that the third time you should fall into my power you would not escape me as you had before. Andrée, Andrée! to the terrible romance which you accused me of inventing, there must be a terrible end!" And with arms extended, he went straight to the sofa where Andrée was lying, still cold, motionless, and unconscious.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WILL.

We have seen Balsamo depart. Djerid bore him on with the speed of lightning, while the rider, pale with terror and impatience, bent forward over the flowing mane, breathing with half-opened lips the air which the crest of the noble steed cleft as the rapid prow of the vessel cuts the waves. Behind him houses and trees disappeared like fantastic visions. He scarcely perceived, as he passed, the clumsy wagon groaning on its axle-tree, while its five huge horses started with affright at the approach of this living meteor, which they could not imagine to belong to the same race as themselves.

Balsamo proceeded at this rate for a league, with whirling brain, sparkling eyes, and panting breath. Horse and rider had traversed Versailles in a few seconds. The startled inhabitants who happened to be in the streets had seen a train of sparks flash past them, — nothing more. A second league was passed in like manner. Djerid had accomplished the distance in little more than a quarter of an hour, and yet this quarter of an hour had seemed to his rider a century. Suddenly a thought darted through his brain. He pulled up suddenly, throwing the noble courser back upon his haunches, while his fore-feet ploughed the ground.

Horse and rider breathed for a moment. Drawing a long breath, Balsamo raised his head. Then wiping the perspiration from his forehead, while his nostrils dilated in

the breeze of night, he murmured: "Oh! madman that you are, neither the rapidity of your steed nor the ardor of your desire will ever equal the instantaneous effect of thunder or the rapidity of the electric flash; and yet it is that which you require to avert the danger impending over you! You require the rapid effect, the instantaneous, the all-powerful shock, which will paralyze the feet whose activity you fear, the tongue whose speech destroys you. You require, at this distance, the victorious sleep which restores to you the possession of the slave who has broken her chain. Oh! if she should ever again be in my power!" and Balsamo, grinding his teeth, made a gesture of despair.

"Oh! you do well to wish, Balsamo; you do well to fly!" he exclaimed. "Lorenza has already arrived, she is about to speak, — she has perhaps already spoken. Oh! wretched woman, no punishment can be terrible enough for you.

"Let me try," continued Balsamo, frowning, his eyes fixed, and his chin resting on his hand; "let me try. Either science is a dream or a fact; it is either impotent or powerful, — let me try. Lorenza, Lorenza! it is my will that you sleep, wheresoever you may be. Lorenza, sleep, — sleep! it is my will! I reckon upon your obedience!

"Oh, no, no!" he murmured, despairingly; "no, I utter a falsehood; I do not believe, — I dare not reckon upon it; and yet the will is all. Oh! I will it with my whole soul, with all the strength of my being. Cleave the air, my potent will; traverse all the currents of opposing or indifferent wills; pass through walls in thy course like a bullet from a gun; follow her wherever she is. Go, strike, destroy! Lorenza, Lorenza! it is my will that you sleep; be dumb at my command!"

And for some moments he concentrated his thoughts upon this aim, imprinting it on his brain as if to lend it more speed in its flight toward Paris. Then after this mysterious operation — in which doubtless all the divine atoms animated by God, the master and lord of all things, assisted — Balsamo, once more setting his teeth hard and clenching his hands, gave the reins to Djerid, but this time without using either the knee or the spurs. It seemed as if Balsamo wished to convince himself.

The noble steed paced gently onward in obedience to the tacit permission of his master, placing his hoof gently upon the pavement with the light and noiseless step peculiar to his race. During all this time, which to a superficial observer would have seemed entirely lost, Balsamo was arranging a complete plan of defence. He concluded it just as Djerid entered the streets of Sèvres. Arrived opposite the park-gates, he stopped and looked round, as if expecting some one. Almost immediately a man emerged from beneath a carriage entrance, and advanced toward him.

"Is that you, Fritz?" asked Balsamo.

"Yes, Master."

"Have you made inquiries?"

"Yes."

"Is Madame Dubarry in Paris, or at Luciennes?"

"She is in Paris."

Balsamo raised his eyes to heaven with a triumphant look.

"How did you come?"

"On Sultan."

"Where is he?"

"In the court-yard of this inn."

"Saddled?"

"Yes."

"Very well; get ready to follow me."

Fritz hastened to bring out Sultan, — one of those strong German horses, of good disposition, who grumble a little at forced marches, but who, nevertheless, go as long as they have breath in their lungs, or while there is a spur at their master's heel. Fritz returned to Balsamo, who was writing by the light of a street-lantern.

"Return to Paris," said he, "and manage by some means to give this note to Madame Dubarry in person. You have half an hour for this purpose. After which you will return to the Rue Saint Claude, where you will wait for Madame Lorenza, who cannot fail to return soon. You will let her pass without any observation and without offering any opposition. Go, and remember, above all, that in half an hour your commission must be executed."

"It is well," said Fritz; "it shall be done." As he gave this confident reply to Balsamo, he attacked Sultan with whip and spur, and the good steed started off, astonished at this unusual aggression, and neighing piteously.

Balsamo by degrees resumed his composure, and took the road to Paris, which he entered three quarters of an hour afterward, appearing quite fresh, and wearing a calm, or rather a thoughtful, expression.

Balsamo's reasoning had been correct. However swift Djerid, that whinnying son of the desert, might be, his speed was in this case useless; thought alone could hope to overtake Lorenza in her flight from prison. From the Rue Saint Claude she had gained the boulevard; and turning to the right, she soon saw the walls of the Bastille rise before her. But Lorenza, constantly a prisoner, was entirely ignorant of Paris. Moreover, her first aim was to escape from that accursed house in which she saw only a dungeon; vengeance was a secondary consideration. She had just entered the Faubourg Saint Antoine, hastening

onward with bewildered steps, when she was accosted by a young man who had been following her for some moments with astonishment.

In fact, Lorenza, an Italian girl from the neighborhood of Rome, having almost always lived a secluded life, far from all knowledge of the fashions and customs of the age, was dressed more like an Oriental than a European lady; that is, in flowing and sumptuous robes, — very unlike the charming dolls of that time, confined, like wasps, in long, tight waists, rustling with silk and muslin, under which it was almost useless to seek a body, their utmost ambition being to appear immaterial.

Lorenza had only adopted from the French costume of that period the shoes with heels two inches high, — that strange-looking invention which stiffened the foot, displayed the beauty of the ankle, and which rendered it impossible for the Arethusas of that rather mythological age to fly from the pursuit of their Alpheuses.

The Alpheus who pursued our Arethusa easily overtook her, therefore. He had seen her lovely ankles peeping from beneath her petticoats of satin and lace, her unpowdered hair, and her dark eyes sparkling with a strange fire from under a mantilla thrown over her head and neck, and he imagined he saw in Lorenza a lady disguised for a masquerade or for a rendezvous, and proceeding on foot, for want of a coach, to some little house of the faubourg. He approached her, therefore, and walking beside her, hat in hand, "Good heavens! Madame," said he, "you cannot go far in this costume and with these shoes, which retard your progress. Will you accept my arm until we find a coach, and allow me the honor of accompanying you to your destination?"

Lorenza turned her head abruptly, gazed with her dark, expressive eyes at the man who thus made her an offer

which to many ladies would have appeared an impertinent one, and stopping, "Yes," said she, "most willingly."

The young man gallantly offered his arm. "Whither are we going, Madame?" he asked.

"To the hôtel of the lieutenant of police."

The young man started. "To Monsieur de Sartines?" he inquired.

"I do not know whether his name is Monsieur de Sartines or not; I wish to speak to whoever is lieutenant of police."

The young man began to reflect. A young and handsome woman wandering alone in the streets of Paris at eight o'clock in the evening, in a strange costume, holding a box under her arm, and inquiring for the hôtel of the lieutenant of police, while she was going in the contrary direction, seemed to him suspicious.

"Ah, *diable!*" said he; "the hôtel of the lieutenant of police is not in this direction at all."

"Where is it, then?"

"In the Faubourg Saint Germain."

"And how must I go to the Faubourg Saint Germain?"

"This way, Madame," replied the young man, calm, but always polite; "and if you wish, we can take the first coach we meet —"

"Oh, yes! a coach; you are right."

The young man conducted Lorenza back to the boulevard, and having met a fiacre, he hailed it. The coachman answered his summons.

"Where to, Madame?" he asked.

"To the hôtel of Monsieur de Sartines," said the young man; and with a last effort of politeness, or rather of astonishment, having opened the coach-door, he bowed to Lorenza; and after assisting her to get in, stood looking after her as one stands gazing in a dream. The coachman,

full of respect for the dreadful name, gave his horse the whip, and drove rapidly in the direction indicated.

It was while Lorenza was thus crossing the Place Royale that Andrée in her magnetic sleep had seen and heard her, and denounced her to Balsamo. In twenty minutes Lorenza was at the door of the hôtel.

"Must I wait for you, my fair lady?" asked the coachman.

"Yes," replied Lorenza, mechanically; and stepping lightly from the coach, she disappeared beneath the portal of the splendid hôtel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HOTEL OF MONSIEUR DE SARTINES.

THE moment Lorenza entered the courtyard, she found herself surrounded by a crowd of soldiers and officers. She addressed the guardsman who stood nearest to her, and begged him to conduct her to the lieutenant of police. The guardsman handed her over to the porter, who, seeing a beautiful stranger, richly dressed, and holding a magnificent coffer under her arm, thought that the visit might prove to be an important one, and preceded her up the grand staircase to an antechamber, where, after the sagacious scrutiny of the porter, every visitor could be admitted to present an explanation, an accusation, or a request, to Monsieur de Sartines, at any hour of the day or night. It is needless to say that the first two classes of visitors were more favorably received than the last.

Lorenza, when questioned by the usher, replied only, "Are you Monsieur de Sartines?"

The usher was profoundly astonished that any one could mistake his black dress and steel chain for the embroidered coat and flowing wig of the lieutenant of police; but as no lieutenant is ever angry at being called captain, as he marked the foreign accent of the lady, and as her firm and steady gaze was not that of a lunatic, he felt convinced that the fair visitor had something important in the coffer which she held so carefully and so securely under her arm.

Nevertheless, since Monsieur de Sartines was a prudent and suspicious man, since traps had been laid for him with baits not less enticing than that of the beautiful Italian, there was good watch kept around him, and Lorenza had to undergo the investigation, the questioning, and the suspicions of half a dozen secretaries and valets. The upshot of all these questions and replies was that Monsieur de Sartines had not yet returned, and that Lorenza must wait. Then the young woman sank into a moody silence, and her eyes wandered over the bare walls of the vast antechamber.

At last the ringing of a bell was heard; a carriage rolled into the courtyard, and a second usher entered, and announced to Lorenza that Monsieur de Sartines was waiting for her.

Lorenza rose, and crossed two halls full of people with suspicious-looking faces, and dresses still more strange than her own. At last she was introduced into a large cabinet of an octagon form, lighted by a number of wax candles.

A man of from fifty to fifty-five years of age, enveloped in a dressing-gown, his head surmounted by a wig profusely powdered and curled, was seated at work before a lofty piece of furniture, the upper part of which, somewhat resembling in form a cupboard, was closed with two doors of looking-glass, in which the person seated could, without moving, see those who entered the room, and could examine their features before they had time to compose them in harmony with his own.

The lower part of this article of furniture formed a secretary. A number of rosewood drawers composed the front, each of which closed by the combination of some letters of the alphabet. Monsieur de Sartines kept in them his papers, and the ciphers which no one could read

while he lived, since the drawers opened for him alone, and which none could decipher after his death, unless in some drawer, still more secret than the others, he should find the key to the cipher.

This secretary, or rather this cupboard, contained behind the glasses of the upper part, twelve drawers, also closed by an invisible mechanism. This piece of furniture, constructed expressly by the regent to contain his chemical or political secrets, had been given by that prince to Dubois, and left by Dubois to Monsieur Dombreval, lieutenant of police. It was from the latter that Monsieur de Sartines had inherited the secretary and the secret. However, Monsieur de Sartines had not consented to use it until after the death of the donor, and even then he had had all the arrangements of the locks altered.

This piece of furniture had some reputation in the world, and shut too closely, people said, for Monsieur de Sartines to keep only his wigs in it. The grumblers, and their name was legion at this period, said that if it were possible to read through the panels of this secretary, there would most certainly have been discovered, in one of its drawers, the famous treaty by virtue of which Louis XV. speculated in grain, through the intervention of his devoted agent, Monsieur de Sartines.

The lieutenant of police therefore saw, reflected in the glass, the pale, serious face of Lorenza as she advanced toward him with the coffer still beneath her arm. In the centre of the apartment the young woman stopped. Her costume, her figure, and the strangeness of her proceedings, struck the lieutenant. "Who are you?" he asked, without turning round, but looking at her in the glass. "What do you want with me?"

"Am I in the presence of Monsieur de Sartines, lieutenant of police?" replied Lorenza.

"Yes," replied he, abruptly.

"Who will assure me of that?"

Monsieur de Sartines turned round.

"Will it be a proof that I am the man you seek," said he, "if I send you to prison?"

Lorenza made no reply. Only, she looked around her with the indescribable dignity peculiar to the women of Italy, seeking the chair which Monsieur de Sartines did not offer her. He was vanquished by this look, for Monsieur le Comte d'Alby de Sartines was a remarkably well-bred man. "Be seated," said he, sharply.

Lorenza drew a chair forward and sat down.

"Speak quickly," said the magistrate. "Come! let me know what you want."

"Monsieur," said Lorenza, "I come to place myself under your protection."

Monsieur de Sartines looked at her with the sarcastic look peculiar to him.

"Ah, ah!" said he.

"Monsieur," continued Lorenza, "I have been carried off from my family, and have, by a false marriage, fallen into the power of a man who for the last three years has oppressed me and made my life miserable."

Monsieur de Sartines looked with admiration upon this noble countenance, and felt touched and charmed by this voice, so soft that its utterance seemed like a strain of music.

"From what country do you come?" he asked.

"I am a Roman."

"What is your name?"

"Lorenza."

"Lorenza what?"

"Lorenza Feliciani."

"I do not know that family. Are you a demoiselle?"

"Demoiselle" at this period meant a lady of quality. In our days a lady thinks herself noble enough when she is married, and wishes thenceforth to be called only "madame."

"I am a demoiselle," replied Lorenza.

"Well, what do you demand?"

"I demand justice against this man who has stolen and incarcerated me."

"That is no affair of mine," said the lieutenant of police; "are you his wife?"

"He says so, at least."

"What! he says so?"

"Yes; but I do not remember anything of it, as the marriage was contracted while I slept."

"*Peste!* you sleep soundly."

"What do you say?"

"I say that it is not in my province. Apply to an attorney and bring an action; I do not like to meddle in family matters." Monsieur de Sartines waved his hand with a gesture which meant, "Begone!" Lorenza did not move.

"Well?" asked Monsieur de Sartines, astonished.

"I have not done yet," said she; "and if I come to you, you must understand that it is not to complain of a trifling matter, but to revenge myself. I have told you my country; the women of my country revenge themselves, but never complain."

"That is another affair," said Monsieur de Sartines; "but speak quickly, fair lady, for my time is precious."

"I told you that I came to you to ask for your protection. Shall I have it?"

"Protection against whom?"

"Against the man upon whom I wish to revenge myself."

"He is powerful, then?"

"More powerful than a king."

"Come, explain, my dear Madame! Why should I protect you against a man who is, in your opinion, more powerful than a king, by reason of an act which is perhaps a crime? If you wish to be revenged on this man, revenge yourself. That is nothing to me; only, if you commit a crime, I shall have to arrest you. After which, we shall see: that is the routine."

"No, Monsieur," said Lorenza; "no, you will not have me arrested, for my vengeance is of the greatest utility to you, to the king, and to France. I shall revenge myself by revealing this man's secrets."

"Ah, ah! he has secrets?" said Monsieur de Sartines, beginning to feel interested in spite of himself.

"Important secrets, Monsieur."

"Of what kind?"

"Political."

"Mention them."

"But, in short, will you protect me?"

"What sort of protection do you require?" said the magistrate, with a cold smile, — "gold, or affection?"

"I only ask permission, Monsieur, to retire to a convent, and to live there concealed and unknown. I ask that this convent may become my tomb, but that this tomb may never be violated by any one in the world."

"Ah!" said the magistrate, "that is not a very exacting demand. You shall have the convent; speak!"

"Then I have your word, Monsieur?"

"I think I said so."

"Then," said Lorenza, "take this coffer, — it contains mysteries which will make you tremble for the safety of the king and his dominions."

"Then you know these mysteries?"

"Only partially; but I know they exist."

"And that they are important?"

"That they are terrible."

"Political secrets, you say?"

"Have you never heard that there existed a secret society?"

"Ah! the freemasons?"

"The invisibles."

"Yes; but I do not believe it."

"When you have opened this coffer, you will believe."

"Ah!" said Monsieur de Sartines, eagerly, "let me see;" and he took the coffer from Lorenza's hands. But suddenly, after a moment's reflection, he placed it upon the desk.

"No," said he, with an air of suspicion; "open the coffer yourself."

"But I have not the key."

"What! you have not the key? You bring me a coffer which contains the safety of a kingdom, and you forget the key?"

"Is it so very difficult, then, to open a lock?"

"No, not when one knows it." Then, after a moment's pause, he added: "We have in this place keys for all kinds of locks; you shall have a bunch (and he looked fixedly at Lorenza), and you shall open it yourself."

"Give it me," said Lorenza, simply.

Monsieur de Sartines held out a bunch of little keys of all kinds to the young woman. She took them; he touched her hand; it was cold as marble.

"But why," said he, "did you not bring the key of the coffer?"

"Because the master of the coffer never lets it out of his possession."

"And who is the master of the coffer, — this man who is more powerful than a king?"

"Who he is, no one can say. The Almighty alone knows how long he has lived; the deeds he accomplishes none see but God."

"But his name, — his name?"

"I have known him change it ten times."

"Well, that by which you generally address him?"

"Acharat."

"And he lives — "

"Rue Saint — "

Suddenly Lorenza started, shuddered, and let the coffer, which she held in the one hand, and the keys, which she held in the other, fall to the ground. She made an effort to reply, her lips were distorted convulsively, she raised her hands to her throat, as if the words she was about to utter had suffocated her; then, tossing her trembling arms aloft, she fell her whole length upon the carpet, unable to utter a single word.

"Poor girl!" murmured Monsieur de Sartines, "what the deuce is the matter with her? She is really very pretty. Ah! there is some jealousy at work in this project of revenge."

He rang the bell hastily, and in the mean time raised the young woman in his arms, who, with staring eyes and motionless lips, seemed already dead and unrelated to the world. Two valets entered.

"Carry this young lady carefully into the adjoining apartment," said he; "endeavor to revive her, but above all, use no violence. Go."

The valets obeyed, and carried Lorenza out.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE COFFER.

When he was alone, Monsieur de Sartines turned the coffer round and round with the air of a man who can appreciate the value of a discovery. Then he stretched out his hands and picked up the bundle of keys which had fallen from Lorenza's hands. He tried them all; none would fit. He took several similar bunches from his drawer. These bunches contained keys of all sizes, — keys of all sorts of articles, coffers included; common keys and microscopic keys. Monsieur de Sartines might be said to possess a pattern of every key known. He tried twenty, fifty, a hundred; not one would even turn round.

The magistrate concluded, therefore, that the lock was only a semblance of a lock, and that consequently his keys were only make-believe keys. He then took a small chisel and a little hammer from the same drawer, and with his white hand, buried in an ample frill of Mechlin lace, he burst open the lock, the faithful guardian of the coffer. A bundle of papers appeared, instead of the destructive machine he had feared to find there, or poisons which should diffuse a fatal odor around, and deprive France of its most useful magistrate.

The first words which met the magistrate's eye were the following, written in a handwriting which was evidently feigned: "Master, it is time to abandon the name of Balsamo." There was no signature, but merely the three letters, L. P. D. "Ha!" said he, twitching the curls of his

wig, "if I do not know the writing, I think I know the name. Balsamo, — let me see; I must search the B's."

Monsieur de Sartines opened one of his twenty-four drawers, and took from it a list, arranged in alphabetical order, written in a fine handwriting full of abbreviations, and containing three or four hundred names, preceded, followed, and accompanied by flaming notes. "Oh, oh!" he murmured, "here is a long article on this Balsamo;" and he read the whole page with unequivocal signs of dissatisfaction. Then he replaced the list in the drawer, and continued the examination of the coffer. He had not proceeded far before his brow assumed a darker hue, and soon he came to a note full of names and ciphers.

This paper seemed important; it was much worn at the edges, and filled with pencil-marks. Monsieur de Sartines rang the bell; a servant appeared. "The assistance of the chancery clerk," said the minister, — "immediately. Let him come through the reception-rooms from the office, to save time."

The valet retired. Two minutes afterward a clerk with a pen in his hand, his hat under one arm, a large register under the other, and wearing sleeves of black serge over his coat-sleeves, appeared on the threshold of the cabinet. Monsieur de Sartines perceived his entrance in the mirror before him, and handed him the paper over his shoulder. "Decipher this," said he.

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied the clerk.

This decipherer of riddles was a little thin man, with pinched lips, eyebrows contracted by study, pale features, and head pointed both at top and bottom, a narrow chin a receding forehead, projecting cheek-bones, hollow and dull eyes, which sometimes sparkled with intelligence. Monsieur de Sartines called him La Fouine.

"down," said the magistrate to him, on seeing him

rather embarrassed, by his note-book, his code of ciphers, his paper, and his pen.

La Fouine modestly took his seat upon the corner of a stool, drew his knees together, and began to write upon them, turning over his dictionary and searching his memory, with an impassive countenance. In five minutes he had written : —

§

"An order to assemble three thousand brothers in Paris.

§

"An order to form three circles and six lodges.

§

"An order to form a guard for the Grand Copt, and to institute four dwellings for him, one in a royal household.

§

"An order to place five hundred thousand francs at his disposal for a police.

§

"An order to enrol in the first of the Parisian circles the flower of literature and philosophy.

§

"An order to hire or to gain over the magistracy, and particularly to make sure of the lieutenant of police, by corruption, violence, or cunning."

Here La Fouine stopped for a moment, — not that the poor man was reflecting, he took care not to do that; it would have been a crime, — but because his page was filled and the ink yet wet, so that he was obliged to wait for its drying before he could proceed.

Monsieur de Sartines, becoming impatient, snatched the paper from his hands and read it.

At the last paragraph, such an expression of fear was painted on his face that he turned a deeper pale at seeing

himself change color in the mirror of his secretary. He did not return the paper to his clerk, but handed him a fresh sheet. The clerk began again, and wrote as fast as he deciphered, — which he did with a facility terrifying for all writers in cipher. This time Monsieur de Sartines read over his shoulder : —

§

"To drop the name of Balsamo, which is already too well known in Paris, and to take that of the Comte de Fe — "

A large blot of ink concealed the rest of the word.

While Monsieur de Sartines was endeavoring to make out the last syllable, which would complete the name, a bell was rung outside, and a valet entering, announced : "The Comte de Fenix."

Monsieur de Sartines uttered a cry ; and at the risk of demolishing the harmonious edifice of his wig, he clasped his hands above his head, and hastened to dismiss his clerk by a secret door. Then, resuming his place before the desk, he said to the valet : "Introduce him."

A few seconds afterward Monsieur de Sartines perceived in his glass the stern profile of the count, whom he had already seen at court on the day of Madame Dubarry's presentation. Balsamo entered without hesitation.

Monsieur de Sartines rose, bowed coldly to the count, and crossing one leg over the other, he seated himself ceremoniously in his armchair. At the first glance the magistrate had divined the cause and the aim of this visit. At the first glance also Balsamo had perceived the opened box, half emptied upon Monsieur de Sartines' desk. His look, however hasty, at the coffer, did not escape the lieutenant of police.

"To what chance do I owe the honor of your presence, Monsieur le Comte ?" asked Monsieur de Sartines.

"Monsieur," replied Balsamo, with a most affable smile, "I have had the honor of being presented to all the sovereigns, ministers, and ambassadors of Europe, but I have not found any one to present me to you; I have therefore come to introduce myself."

"In truth, Monsieur," replied the lieutenant of police, "you arrive most opportunely; for I am quite sure that had you not come of yourself, I should have had the honor of sending for you."

"Ah, indeed!" said Balsamo; "that is a coincidence!"

Monsieur de Sartines inclined his head with a sarcastic smile.

"Shall I be so fortunate as to be of any use to you?" asked Balsamo; and these words were uttered without a shadow of emotion or of uneasiness clouding his smiling features.

"You have travelled much, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the lieutenant of police.

"A great deal, Monsieur."

"Ah!"

"You wish for some geographical information, perhaps? A man of your capacity does not confine his observations to France alone; he surveys Europe, — the world."

"'Geographical,' is not exactly the word, Count. 'Moral' would be more correct."

"Have no scruples I beg; for the one, as for the other, I am wholly at your service."

"Well, Monsieur le Comte, picture to yourself that I am in search of a most dangerous man, — a man who, on my word, is a complete atheist."

"Oh!"

"A conspirator."

"Oh!"

"A forger."

"Oh!"

"A debauchee, a false coiner, a quack, a charlatan, the chief of a society, a man whose history I have in my books, in this box that you see here, — everywhere, indeed."

"Ah! yes, I comprehend," said Balsamo; "you have the history, but not the man."

"No."

"The devil! The latter is the more important, it seems to me."

"Of course; but you will see that we are not far from having him. Certainly Proteus had not more forms, nor Jupiter more names, than this mysterious traveller. Acharat in Egypt, Balsamo in Italy, Somini in Sardinia, the Marquis d'Anna in Malta, the Marquis Pellegrini in Corsica, and lastly, the Comte de —?"

"Comte de —?" added Balsamo.

"The last name, Monsieur, I have not been able to read. But I am sure you will assist me, will you not? For there is no doubt you must have met this man during your travels in each of the countries I have just now named."

"Enlighten me a little, I entreat," said Balsamo, quietly.

"Ah! I understand; you wish for a description of his person, do you not, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Yes, Monsieur, if you please."

"Well!" said Monsieur de Sartines, fixing a glance which he intended to be inquisitorial upon Balsamo, "he is a man of your age, of your size, of your figure. He is sometimes a great lord, scattering money on all sides; sometimes a charlatan, searching into the secrets of Nature; sometimes a gloomy member of some mysterious brotherhood which meets by night and swears death to kings, and the destruction of thrones."

"Oh!" said Balsamo, "that is very vague."

"How, vague?"

"If you knew how many men I have seen who resemble this description."

"Really?"

"Of course; and you must be a little more precise if you wish me to assist you. In the first place, do you know in which country he prefers to live?"

"He dwells in all."

"But at present, for instance?"

"At present he is in France."

"And what is he doing in France?"

"He is directing an immense conspiracy."

"Ah! that is indeed some clew; and if you know what conspiracy he directs, you hold the thread at the end of which, in all probability, you will find your man."

"I am quite of your opinion."

"Well, if you think so, why do you ask my advice? It is useless."

"Ah! but I am not yet decided."

"On what point?"

"Whether I shall arrest him or not."

"I do not understand the *not*, Monsieur; for if he conspires —"

"Yes, but if he is partially defended by some name or by some title?"

"Ah, I understand! But what name? — what title? You must tell me that before I can assist you in your search, Monsieur."

"Why, Monsieur, I have told you that I know the name under which he conceals himself; but —"

"But do you not know the one under which he shows himself, — is that it?"

"Yes, otherwise —"

"Otherwise you would arrest him?"

"Instantly."

"Well, my dear Monsieur de Sartines, it is very fortunate, as you said just now, that I arrived at this moment; for I will do you the service you require."

"You?"

"Yes."

"You will tell me his name?"

"Yes."

"The name under which he shows himself?"

"Yes."

"Then you know him?"

"Very well."

"And what is his name?" asked Monsieur de Sartines, expecting some falsehood.

"The Comte de Fenix."

"What! the name by which you were announced?"

"The name by which I was announced, — yes."

"Your name?"

"My name."

"Then this Acharat, this Somini, this Marquis d'Anna, this Marquis Pellegrini, this Joseph Balsamo, is you?"

"Yes," said Balsamo, quietly, "is myself."

It was a minute before Monsieur de Sartines could recover from the vertigo which this frank avowal caused him.

"You see, I knew it," said he. "I recognized you. I knew that Joseph Balsamo and the Comte de Fenix were the same."

"Ah!" said Balsamo, "you are a great minister, — I confess it!"

"And you are most imprudent," said the magistrate, advancing toward the bell.

"Imprudent, why?"

"Because I am going to have you arrested."

"What say you?" replied Balsamo, stepping between the magistrate and the bell. "You are going to arrest me?"

"*Pardieu!* what can you do to prevent me, may I ask?"

"You ask me?"

"Yes."

"My dear lieutenant of police, I will blow your brains out;" and Balsamo drew from his pocket a charming little pistol mounted in silver gilt, — which, from its appearance, might have been chased by Benvenuto Cellini, — and calmly levelled it at the forehead of Monsieur de Sartines, who turned pale and sank into an armchair.

"There," said Balsamo, drawing another chair close to that occupied by the lieutenant of police, and sitting down, "now that we are comfortably seated, we can chat a little."

CHAPTER XXV.

CONVERSATION.

MONSIEUR DE SARTINES was a moment or two recovering from his rather severe alarm. He had seen the threatening muzzle of the pistol presented before his very eye; he had even felt the cold metal of the barrel upon his forehead. At last he recovered. "Monsieur," said he, "you have an advantage over me. Knowing what sort of a man I had to deal with, I did not take the precautions usually adopted against common malefactors."

"Oh, Monsieur!" replied Balsamo, "now you are getting angry, and use injurious expressions. Do you not see how unjust you are? I come to do you a service."

Monsieur de Sartines made a movement.

"Yes, Monsieur, to serve you," resumed Balsamo, "and you misunderstand my intentions; you speak to me of conspirators at the very time when I come to denounce a conspiracy to you."

But Balsamo talked in vain. Monsieur de Sartines did not at that moment pay any great attention to the words of his dangerous visitor; and the word "conspiracy," which on other occasions would have been sufficient to make him bound from his seat, he hardly noticed.

"Since you know so well who I am, Monsieur, you are aware of my mission in France. Sent by his Majesty the great Frederick, I am more or less secretly the ambassador of his Prussian Majesty. Now by ambassador is understood an inquirer; in my capacity as inquirer I am igno-

rant of nothing that happens; and a subject upon which I am particularly well informed is the monopoly of grain."

However unpretendingly Balsamo uttered these last words, they nevertheless produced more effect upon the lieutenant of police than all the others, for they made him attentive. He slowly raised his head.

"What is that about grain?" said he, affecting as much assurance as Balsamo himself had displayed at the beginning of the interview. "Be good enough, in your turn, to instruct me, Monsieur."

"Willingly, Monsieur," said Balsamo. "This is the whole matter —"

"I am all attention."

"Oh, you do not need to tell me that! Some very clever speculators have persuaded his Majesty the king of France that he ought to construct granaries for his people in case of scarcity. These granaries, therefore, have been constructed. While they were doing it, they thought it as well to make them large. Nothing was spared, neither stone nor brick, and they were made very large."

"Well?"

"Well, they had then to be filled. Empty granaries were useless, therefore they were filled."

"Well! Monsieur," said Monsieur de Sartines, not seeing very clearly as yet what Balsamo was driving at.

"Well! you may readily conceive that to fill these very large granaries, a great quantity of grain was required. Is that not evident?"

"Yes."

"To continue, then. A large quantity of grain withdrawn from circulation is one way of starving the people; for, mark this: any amount taken from the circulation is equivalent to a failure in the production. A thousand sacks of corn more in the granary are a thousand sacks of

corn less in the market-place. If you only multiply these thousand sacks by ten, the corn will rise considerably."

Monsieur de Sartines was seized with an irritating cough. Balsamo paused, and waited till the cough was quieted.

"You see, then," he continued, as soon as the lieutenant of police would permit him, "you see that the speculator in these granaries is enriched by the amount of the rise in value. Is that clear to you?"

"Perfectly clear, Monsieur," said Monsieur de Sartines; "but, as far as I can understand, it seems that you have the presumption to denounce to me a conspiracy or a crime of which his Majesty is the author?"

"Exactly," said Balsamo; "you understand me very well."

"That is a bold step, Monsieur; and I confess that I am rather curious to see how his Majesty will take your accusation; I fear much the result will be precisely the same that I proposed to myself on looking over the papers in this box before your arrival. Take care, Monsieur; your destination in either case will be the Bastille."

"Ah! now you do not understand me at all."

"How so?"

"Good heavens! how incorrect an opinion you form of me, and how deeply you wrong me, Monsieur, in taking me for a fool! What! you imagine I intend to attack the king, — I, an ambassador, an inquirer? Why, that would be the work of a simpleton! Hear me to the end, I beg of you."

Monsieur de Sartines bowed.

"The persons who have discovered this conspiracy against the French people (forgive me for taking up your valuable time, Monsieur, but you will see directly that it is not lost), — they who have discovered this conspiracy against

the French people are economists, — laborious and exact men, who by their careful investigation of this underhand game have discovered that the king does not play alone. They know well that his Majesty keeps an exact register of the rate of corn in the different markets; they know that his Majesty rubs his hands with glee when the rise has produced him eight or ten thousand crowns; but they know also that beside his Majesty there stands a man whose position facilitates the sales, a man who naturally, thanks to certain functions (he is a functionary, you must know), superintends the purchases, the receipts, the storage, — a man, in short, who manages for the king. Now, these economists — these microscopic observers, as I call them — will not attack the king, for of course they are not mad, but they will attack, my dear Monsieur, the man, the functionary, the agent, who thus intrigues for his Majesty."

Monsieur de Sartines endeavored in vain to restore the equilibrium of his wig.

"Now," continued Balsamo, "I am coming to the point. Just as you, who have a police, knew that I was the Comte de Fenix, so I know that you are Monsieur de Sartines."

"Well, what then?" said the embarrassed magistrate. "Yes, I am Monsieur de Sartines, — a fine discovery?"

"Ah! but cannot you understand that this Monsieur de Sartines is precisely the man of the price list, of the underhand dealings, of the stowing away, — he who, either with or without the king's cognizance, traffics with the food of twenty-seven millions of French people, whom his office requires him to feed on the best possible terms? Now, just imagine the effect of such a discovery. You are not much beloved by the people; the king is not a very considerate man: as soon as the cries of the famishing

millions demand your head, the king — to avert all suspicion of connivance with you, if there is connivance, or if there is no connivance, to do justice — will cause you to be hanged upon a gibbet, like Enguerrand de Marigny. Do you recollect Enguerrand?"

"Imperfectly," said Monsieur de Sartines, turning very pale; "and it is a proof of very bad taste, I think, Monsieur, to talk of gibbets to a man of my rank."

"Oh! if I alluded to it," replied Balsamo, "it was because I think I see poor Enguerrand still before me. I assure you he was a perfect gentleman, from Normandy, of a very ancient family and a noble descent. He was chamberlain of France, captain of the Louvre, comptroller of finance and of buildings; he was Count of Longueville, which county is more considerable than yours of Alby. Well, Monsieur, I saw him hanged upon the gallows of Montfaucon, which he had himself constructed! Thank God, it was not a crime to have said to him, 'Enguerrand, my dear Enguerrand, take care! You are dipping into the finances to an extent that Charles of Valois will never pardon.' He would not listen to me, Monsieur, and unfortunately he perished. Alas! if you knew how many prefects of police I have seen, from Pontius Pilate down to Monsieur Bertin de Belle-Isle, Comte de Bourdeilles, Lord of Brantôme, your predecessor, who first introduced the lantern, and prohibited the scales!"

Monsieur de Sartines rose, and endeavored in vain to conceal the agitation which preyed upon him. "Well," said he, "you can accuse me if you like. Of what importance is the testimony of a man such as you, who has no influence or connections?"

"Take care, Monsieur," said Balsamo; "frequently those who seem to have no connections are connected far and wide. And when I shall write the history of these

corn speculations to my correspondent Frederick, who, you know, is a philosopher; when Frederick shall hasten to communicate the affair, with his comments upon it, to Monsieur Arouet de Voltaire; when the latter, with his pen, whose reputation, at least, I hope you know, shall have metamorphosed it into a little comic tale in the style of 'L'homme aux quarante Écus;' when Monsieur d'Alembert, that excellent geometrician, shall have calculated that the corn withdrawn from the public consumption by you might have fed a hundred millions of men for two or three years; when Helvetius shall have shown that the price of this corn, converted into crowns of six francs and piled up, would touch the moon, or, into bank-notes placed side by side, would reach to St. Petersburg; when this calculation shall have inspired Monsieur de la Harpe to write a bad drama, Diderot a family conversation, and Monsieur Jean Jacques Rousseau, of Geneva, who has a tolerably sharp bite when he chooses, a terrible paraphrase of this conversation, with commentaries; when Monsieur Caron de Beaumarchais — may Heaven preserve you from treading on his toes! — shall have written a memoir, Monsieur Grimm a little letter, Monsieur d'Holbach a thundering attack, Monsieur de Marmontel an amiable moral tale, in which he will kill you by defending you badly; when you shall be spoken of in the Café de la Régence, the Palais Royal, at Audinot's, among the king's dancers, — maintained, as you know, by Monsieur Nicolet, — ah! Comte d'Alby, you will be in a much worse case than was that poor Enguerrand de Marigny, whom you would not hear me mention, when he stood under the gallows; for he asserted his innocence, and that with so much earnestness that, on my word of honor, I believed him when he affirmed it to me."

At these words Monsieur de Sartines, no longer paying

any heed to decorum, took off his wig and wiped his bald head, which was bathed in perspiration. "Well," said he, "so be it! But all that will not prevent me in the least. Ruin me if you can; you have your proofs, I have mine. Keep your secret, I shall keep the coffer."

"Oh! Monsieur," said Balsamo, "that is another error into which I am surprised that a man of your talents should fall; this coffer —"

"Well, what of it?"

"You will not keep."

"Oh!" exclaimed Monsieur de Sartines, with a sarcastic smile, "true; I had forgotten that the Comte de Fenix is a gentleman of the highway who rifles travellers with the strong hand. I forgot your pistol, because you have replaced it in your pocket. Excuse me, my lord ambassador."

"But, good heavens! why speak of pistols, Monsieur de Sartines? You surely do not believe that I mean to carry off the coffer by main force; that when on the stairs I may hear your bell ring and your voice cry, 'Stop thief!' Oh, no! When I say that you will not keep this coffer, I mean that you will restore it to me willingly, and without constraint."

"What, I?" exclaimed the magistrate, placing his clenched hand upon the disputed object with so much weight that he nearly broke it.

"Yes, you."

"Oh! very well, Monsieur, mock away; but as to taking this coffer, I tell you you shall have it only with my life. And have I not risked my life a thousand times? Do I not owe it, to the last drop, to the service of his Majesty? Kill me, — you can do so; but the noise will summon my avengers, and I shall have voice enough left to convict you of all your crimes. Ah! give you back

this coffer," added he, with a bitter smile, — "all hell should not wrest it from me!"

"And therefore I shall not employ the intervention of the subterranean powers. I shall be satisfied with that of the person who is just now knocking at the gate of your court-yard."

And in fact, just at that moment, three blows, struck with an air of command, were heard outside.

"And whose carriage," continued Balsamo, "is just now entering the court."

"It seems, then, that it is some friend of yours who is coming to honor me with a visit?"

"As you say, — a friend of mine."

"And I shall hand this coffer to that friend?"

"Yes, my dear Monsieur de Sartines, you will give it to that friend."

The lieutenant of police had not finished his gesture of lofty disdain when a valet opened the door hastily, and announced that Madame Dubarry wished for an interview.

Monsieur de Sartines started, and looked in stupefied amazement at Balsamo, who required all his self-command to avoid laughing in the face of the honorable magistrate. Close behind the valet appeared a lady who seemed to have no need of permission to enter. It was the beautiful countess, whose flowing and perfumed skirts gently rustled as they brushed through the doorway of the cabinet.

"You, Madame, you!" exclaimed Monsieur de Sartines, who in the instinct of terror had seized the open coffer in both hands, and clasped it to his breast.

"Good-day, Sartines," said the countess, with her gay smile; then, turning to Balsamo, "Good-day, dear Count," she added; and she gave her hand to the latter, who familiarly bent over the white fingers, and pressed his lips

where the royal lips had so often rested. In this movement Balsamo managed to whisper a few words aside to the countess, which Sartines could not hear.

"Ah!" exclaimed the countess, "there is my coffer."

"Your coffer!" stammered Monsieur de Sartines.

"Of course, my coffer. Oh! you have opened it; you do not observe much ceremony!"

"But, Madame —"

"Oh, it is delightful! The idea occurred to me at once that some one had stolen this coffer; and then I said to myself, 'I must go to Sartines; he will find it for me.' You did not wait till I asked you; you found it beforehand, — a thousand thanks!"

"And as you see," said Balsamo, "Monsieur has even opened it."

"Yes, really, — who could have thought it? Why, it is abominable, Sartines!"

"Madame, notwithstanding all the respect I have for you," said the lieutenant of police, "I fear that you are imposed upon."

"Imposed, Monsieur!" said Balsamo. "Do you perchance mean that word for me?"

"I know what I know," replied Monsieur de Sartines.

"And I know nothing," whispered Madame Dubarry in a low voice to Balsamo. "Come, tell me what is the matter, my dear Count! You have claimed the fulfilment of the promise I made you, to grant the first favor you should ask. I keep my word like a woman of honor, and here I am. Tell me what must I do for you?"

"Madame," replied Balsamo, aloud, "you confided the care of this coffer and everything it contains to me, a few days ago."

"Of course," answered Madame Dubarry, replying by a look to the count's appealing glance.

"Of course!" exclaimed Monsieur de Sartines; "you say 'of course,' Madame?"

"Yes; Madame pronounced the words loud enough for you to hear them, I should think."

"A box which contains perhaps ten conspiracies!"

"Ah! Monsieur de Sartines, you are aware that that word is rather an unfortunate one for you; do not repeat it. Madame asks for her box again; give it her, — that is all."

"Do you ask me for it, Madame?" said Monsieur de Sartines, trembling with anger.

"Yes, my dear magistrate."

"But learn, at least —"

Balsamo looked at the countess.

"You can tell me nothing I do not know," said Madame Dubarry; "give me the coffer. You may believe I did not come for nothing!"

"But in the name of the living God, Madame! in the name of his Majesty's safety —"

Balsamo made an impatient gesture.

"The coffer, Monsieur!" said the countess, abruptly; "the coffer, — yes or no? Reflect well before you refuse."

"As you please, Madame!" said Monsieur de Sartines, humbly; and he handed the coffer, in which Balsamo had already replaced all the papers scattered over the desk, to the countess.

Madame Dubarry turned toward Balsamo with a charming smile. "Count," said she, "will you carry this coffer to my carriage for me, and give me your hand through all these antechambers, in which are so many ugly faces? Thanks, Sartines!"

And Balsamo was already advancing toward the door with his protectress, when he saw Monsieur de Sartines moving toward the bell. "Countess," said Balsamo,

stopping his enemy with a look, "be good enough to tell Monsieur de Sartines, who is quite enraged with me for having reclaimed your coffer, — be good enough to tell him how much grieved you would be if any misfortune were to happen to me through the agency of the lieutenant of police, and how displeased you would be with him."

The countess smiled on Balsamo. "You hear what the count says, my dear Sartines? Well, it is the simple truth! The count is an excellent friend of mine, and I should be mortally angry with you if you offended him in any way whatsoever. Adieu, Sartines!" and placing her hand in Balsamo's, who carried the coffer, Madame Dubarry left the cabinet of the lieutenant of police.

Monsieur de Sartines saw them depart without displaying that fury which Balsamo expected him to manifest. "Go!" said the conquered magistrate; "go, you have the box, but I have the woman!" and to compensate himself for his disappointment, he rang in a way to break all the bells in the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SARTINES BEGINS TO THINK BALSAMO A SORCERER.

At the violent ringing of Monsieur de Sartines' bell, an usher entered.

"Well," asked the magistrate, "that woman?"

"What woman, Monseigneur?"

"The woman who fainted here just now, and whom I confided to your care."

"Monseigneur, she is quite well," replied the usher.

"Very good; bring her to me."

"Where shall I find her, Monseigneur?"

"What do you mean? In that room, of course."

"But she is no longer there, Monseigneur."

"Not there! Then where is she?"

"I do not know."

"She has gone?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"But she could not stand!"

"Monseigneur, it is true that for some moments she remained in a swoon; but five minutes after the Comte de Fenix entered Monseigneur's cabinet, she awoke from this strange fit, which neither essences nor salts affected in the least. Then she opened her eyes, rose, and breathed with an air of satisfaction."

"Well, what then?"

"She proceeded toward the door; and as Monseigneur had not ordered that she should be detained, she was allowed to depart."

"Gone!" cried Monsieur de Sartines. "Ah, wretch that you are! I shall send you all to rot at Bicêtre! Quick, quick! send me my head-clerk!"

The usher retired hastily to obey the order he had received.

"The scoundrel is a sorcerer!" muttered the unfortunate magistrate. "I am lieutenant of police to the king, but he is lieutenant of police to the devil!"

The reader has no doubt understood what Monsieur de Sartines could not explain to himself. Immediately after the incident of the pistol, and while the lieutenant of police was endeavoring to regain his equanimity, Balsamo, profiting by the momentary respite, had turned successively to the four cardinal points, quite sure of finding Lorenza in the direction of one of them, and had ordered her to rise, to go out, and to return, by the way she had come, to the Rue Saint Claude. The moment this wish had been formed in Balsamo's mind, a magnetic current was established between him and the young woman, and the latter, obeying the order she had received by intuition, rose and went away without meeting any opposition.

Monsieur de Sartines that same evening took to his bed, and caused himself to be bled, — the revulsion had been too strong for him to bear it with impunity; and the doctor assured him that a quarter of an hour more would have brought on an attack of apoplexy.

Meanwhile Balsamo had accompanied the countess to her carriage, and had attempted to take his leave of her; but she was not a woman to let him go thus without knowing, or at least without endeavoring to discover, the solution of the strange event which had taken place before

her. She begged the count to enter her carriage. The count obeyed, and a groom led Djerid behind.

"You see now, Count," said she, "whether I am true or not, and whether, when I have called any one my friend, I have spoken with the lips merely, or from the heart. I was just setting out for Luciennes, where the king had said he would pay me a visit to-morrow morning; but your letter arrived, and I left everything for you. Many would have been frightened at the words 'conspiracies' and 'conspirators' which Monsieur de Sartines threw in your teeth; but I looked at your countenance before I acted, and did as you wished me."

"Madame," replied Balsamo, "you have amply repaid the slight service I was able to render you; but with me nothing is lost, — you will find that I can be grateful. Do not imagine, however, that I am a criminal, — a conspirator, as Monsieur de Sartines said. That worthy magistrate had received, from some person who betrayed me, this coffer, containing some chemical and hermetical secrets, — which I shall share with you, that you may preserve your wonderful, your splendid beauty, and your dazzling youth. Now, seeing the ciphers of my formulas, this excellent Monsieur de Sartines called the chancery clerk to assist him, who, in order not to be found wanting, interpreted them after his own fashion. I think I have already told you, Madame, that the profession is not yet entirely freed from the dangers which were attendant on it in the Middle Ages. Only young and intelligent minds like yours favor it. In short, Madame, you have saved me from a great embarrassment; I thank you for it, and shall prove my gratitude."

"But what would he have done with you if I had not come to your assistance?"

"To annoy King Frederick, whom his Majesty hates,

he would have imprisoned me in Vincennes or the Bastille. I should have escaped from it, I know, — thanks to my process for melting stone with a breath, — but I should have lost my coffer, which contains, as I have had the honor of telling you, many curious and invaluable formulas, wrested by a happy venture of science from the eternal shades."

"Ah, Count! you at once delight and reassure me. Then you promise me a philtre to make me young again?"

"Yes."

"And when will you give it me?"

"Oh! you need be in no hurry. You may ask for it twenty years hence, beautiful countess. In the mean time I think you do not wish to become quite a child again."

"You are, in truth, a charming man. One question more, and I will let you go, for you seem in haste."

"Speak, Countess."

"You said that some one had betrayed you. Is it a man, or a woman?"

"A woman."

"Ah, ah! Count, — a love affair?"

"Alas! yes, complicated by an almost frantic jealousy, which has produced the pleasant effect you have seen. It is a woman who, not daring to stab me with a knife because she knows I cannot be killed, wanted to imprison and ruin me."

"What, ruin you?"

"She endeavored to do so, at least."

"Count, I will stop here," said the countess, laughing. "Is it the quicksilver in your veins that gives you that immortality which makes people betray you, instead of killing you? Shall I set you down here, or drive you to your own house?"

"No, Madame, I cannot allow you to inconvenience yourself on my account. I have my horse Djerid."

"Ah! that wonderful animal which, it is said, outstrips the wind?"

"He seems to please you, Madame."

"He is in truth a magnificent steed."

"Allow me to offer him to you, on the condition that you alone ride him."

"Oh! no, thank you; I do not ride on horseback, — or, at least, I am a very timid horsewoman. I am as much obliged to you, however, as if I accepted your offer. Adieu! my dear Count; do not forget my philtre, — in ten years."

"I said twenty."

"Count, you know the proverb, — 'a bird in the hand—;' and if you could even give it me in five years — There is no knowing what may happen."

"Whenever you please, Countess. Are you not aware that I am entirely at your command?"

"Only one word more, Count."

"I listen, Madame."

"It proves that I have great confidence in you to speak of it."

Balsamo, who had already alighted from the carriage, suppressed his impatience, and approached the countess.

"It is reported everywhere," continued Madame Dubarry, "that the king is rather taken with that little Taverney."

"Ah! Madame," said Balsamo, "is it possible?"

"A very great partiality, it is said. You must tell me if it is true. Count, do not deceive me; I beseech you to treat me as a friend. Tell me the truth, Count."

"Madame," replied Balsamo, "I will do more; I will promise you that Mademoiselle Andrée shall never be the king's mistress."

"And why not?" cried Madame Dubarry.

"Because I do not wish it," said Balsamo.

"Oh!" said Madame Dubarry, incredulously.

"You doubt."

"Is it not allowed?"

"Never doubt the truths of science, Madame. You have believed me when I said yes; believe me when I say no."

"But, in short, have you the means—?" she paused, smiling.

"Well?"

"Means capable of destroying the king's will, or conquering his whims?"

Balsamo smiled. "I create sympathies," said he.

"Yes, I know that."

"You believe it, even."

"I believe it."

"Well, I can create aversions also, and if needful, impossibilities. Therefore, Countess, make your mind easy; I am on guard."

Balsamo uttered all these fragments of sentences with an absence of mind which Madame Dubarry would not have taken as she did for inspiration, had she known the feverish anxiety which Balsamo felt to be with Lorenza as quickly as possible.

"Well, Count," said she, "assuredly you are not only my prophet of happiness, but also my guardian angel. Count, mark my words; defend me, and I will defend you. Alliance, alliance!"

"Agreed, Madame," replied Balsamo, kissing the countess's hand. Then closing the door of the carriage, which the countess had stopped upon the Champs Élysées, he mounted his horse, who neighed joyously, and was soon lost to view in the shadows of night.

"To Luciennes!" said the countess, consoled.

Balsamo whistled softly, and gently pressed his knees against Djerid's side, who started off at a gallop. Five minutes afterward he was in the vestibule of the Rue Saint Claude looking at Fritz. "Well?" asked he, anxiously.

"Yes, Master," replied the domestic, who was accustomed to read his looks.

"She has returned?"

"She is upstairs."

"In which room?"

"In the chamber of furs."

"In what state is she?"

"Oh! very much exhausted. She ran so quickly that although I saw her coming, for I was watching for her, I had scarcely time to hasten to meet her."

"Indeed!"

"Oh! I was quite alarmed. She swept on like a tempest; rushed upstairs without taking breath; and when she entered the room, she fell upon the large black lion's skin. You will find her there."

Balsamo hastily ascended, and found Lorenza where Fritz had said. She was struggling in vain against the first convulsions of a nervous crisis. The fluid had weighed upon her too long already, and forced her to violent efforts. She suffered, she moaned; it seemed as if a mountain weighed upon her breast, and that she endeavored with both hands to remove it.

Balsamo looked at her with eyes angrily flashing; and taking her in his arms, he carried her into her apartment, the mysterious door of which closed behind him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ELIXIR OF LIFE.

Balsamo had just entered Lorenza's apartment, and was preparing to awake her and overwhelm her with all the reproaches which his gloomy anger prompted, fully determined to punish her according to the dictates of that anger, when a triple knock upon the ceiling announced that Althotas had watched for his return, and wished to speak to him.

Nevertheless Balsamo waited; he was hoping either that he had been mistaken, or that the signal had been accidental, when the impatient old man repeated his blows. Balsamo, therefore, — fearing, no doubt, to see him descend, as he had done before, or that Lorenza, awakened by an influence opposed to his own, might acquire the knowledge of some new matter no less dangerous for him than that of his political secrets, — Balsamo, therefore, after having, if we may so express it, charged Lorenza with an additional quantity of the electric fluid, left the room to visit Althotas.

It was high time; the trap-door was already half-way from the ceiling. Althotas had left his wheeled armchair, and was seen squatting down upon the movable part of the ceiling, which rose and fell. He saw Balsamo leave Lorenza's room.

Squatting thus, the old man was at once hideous and terrible to behold. His white face, or rather some parts of

that face, which still seemed to be alive, were purple with the violence of his rage. His meagre and bony hands, like those of a human skeleton, trembled and shook; his hollow eyes seemed to vacillate in their deep caverns; and in a language unknown even to his disciple, he was loading him with the most violent invectives.

Having left his armchair to touch the spring, Althotas seemed to live and move only by the aid of his long arms, lean and angular as those of a spider; and issuing, as we have said, from his chamber, inaccessible to all but Balsamo, he was about to descend to the lower apartment. In order that this feeble old man, indolent as he was, should leave his armchair, that cleverly constructed machine which spared him all fatigue, and consent to perform one of the actions of common life, — in order that he should undergo the care and fatigue of such a change in his usual habits, it was necessary that some extraordinary excitement should have withdrawn him from his meditative life, and compelled him to enter again reality.

Balsamo, taken as it were in the fact, seemed at first astonished, then uneasy.

"Ah!" exclaimed Althotas, "there you are, you good-for-nothing, you ingrate! There you are, coward, who desert your master!"

Balsamo called all his patience to his aid, as he invariably did when he spoke to the old man. "But," he replied, quietly, "I think, my friend, you have only just called me."

"Your friend?" exclaimed Althotas; "your friend? you vile human creature! You dare to speak the language of equality to me! I have been a friend to you, — more than a friend, a father, — a father who has educated, instructed, and enriched you. But you my friend? Oh, no! for you abandon me; you assassinate me!"

"Come, Master, you disturb your bile; you irritate your blood; you will make yourself ill."

"Ill? Nonsense! Have I ever been ill, except when you made me a sharer, in spite of myself, in some of the miseries of your impure human-kind? Ill! Have you forgotten that it is I who heal others?"

"Well, Master," replied Balsamo, coldly, "I am here. Let us not lose time in vain."

"Yes, I advise you to remind me of that. Time, time! which you oblige me to economize, — me, for whom this element, circumscribed to all the world, should be endless, unlimited! Yes, my time flies; yes, my time is lost, — my time, like the time of other people, falls minute by minute into the gulf of eternity, when for me it ought to be eternity itself!"

"Come, Master," said Balsamo, with unalterable patience, lowering the trap to the ground as he spoke, placing himself upon it, and causing it to rise again to its place in the room; "come, what is it you want? You say I starve you; but are you not in your forty days of fasting?"

"Yes, yes, doubtless; the work of regeneration began thirty-two days ago."

"Then tell me, of what do you complain? I see two or three bottles of rain-water, the only kind you drink, still remaining."

"Of course; but do you imagine I am a silkworm to complete the grand work of renovation of youth and of transformation alone? Do you imagine that, powerless as I am, I can compose alone the elixir of life? Or think you that, sitting here in my chair, enervated by cooling drinks, my sole nourishment, I could have power of mind enough, when left to my own resources, without your assistance, to complete the minute work of my regeneration,

in which, as you, unhappy man, well know, I must be aided and supported by a friend?"

"I am here, Master, I am here. Answer me now," said Balsamo, replacing the old man in his chair almost in spite of himself, as he would have handled a hideous infant; "answer me, — you have not been in want of distilled water, for, as I said before, there are three bottles still remaining. This water, as you know, was all collected in the month of May; there are your biscuits of barley and of sesame, and I myself administered to you the white drops you prescribed."

"Yes, but the elixir! The elixir is not made! You do not remember it, for you were not there; it was your father, — your father, who was far more faithful than you are; but at the last fiftieth I had the elixir ready a month beforehand. I had my retreat on Mount Ararat. A Jew provided me with a Christian child still at its mother's breast, for its weight in gold. I bled it according to the rule; I took the last three drops of its arterial blood, and in an hour my elixir, which wanted only this ingredient, was composed. Therefore my first regeneration succeeded wonderfully well. My hair and teeth fell out during the convulsions which succeeded the absorption of that wondrous elixir, but they grew again, — the latter badly enough, I know, because I neglected the precaution of letting the elixir flow into my throat through a golden conduit. But my hair and my nails grew again in this second youth, and I began again to live as if I were only fifteen years of age. Now I am old again; I am bordering on the extreme limit; and if the elixir is not ready, if it is not safely enclosed in this bottle, if I do not bestow all possible care upon this work, the science of a century will be annihilated with me, and the admirable, the sublime secret I possess will be lost for man, who in me and

through me approaches divineness! Oh! if I fail, if I am mistaken, if I miss it, Acharat, it will be your fault; and take care, for my anger will be terrible, — terrible!" and as he uttered these last words, a livid glare shot from his dying eyeball, and the old man fell into a brief convulsion, which ended in a violent fit of coughing.

Balsamo instantly lavished the most eager attentions on him, and the old man recovered. His complexion had become death-like instead of pale. This feeble attack had weakened his strength so much that one would have thought he was dying.

"Come, Master," said Balsamo, "tell me plainly what you want."

"What I want!" said he, looking fixedly at Balsamo.

"Yes."

"What I want is this — "

"Speak; I hear you, and I will obey, if what you ask is possible."

"Possible, possible!" muttered the old man, contemptuously. "You know that everything is possible."

"Yes, with time and science."

"Science I have, and I am on the point of conquering time. My dose has succeeded. My strength has almost entirely left me. The white drops have caused the expulsion of all the remaining portion of my former nature. Youth, like the sap of the trees in May, rises under the old bark, and buds, so to speak, through the old wood. You may remark, Acharat, that the symptoms are excellent, — my voice is weak, my sight is three-quarters gone; sometimes I feel my mind wander; I have become insensible to the transition from heat to cold. I must therefore hasten to finish my elixir, in order that, on the completion of my second fifty years, I may at once pass from a hundred years old to twenty. The ingredients for the elixir

are all made, the conduit is ready ; I want nothing but the three drops of blood I told you of."

Balsamo made a gesture of repugnance.

"Very well," said Althotas, "let us abandon the child, since it is so difficult, and since you prefer to shut yourself up the whole day with your mistress, to seeking it for me."

"You know, Master, that Lorenza is not my mistress," replied Balsamo.

"Oh ! oh ! oh ! " exclaimed Althotas ; "you say that ! You think to impose on me as on the mass ; you would make me believe in an immaculate creature, — and yet you are a man ! "

"I swear to you, Master, that Lorenza is as pure as an angel ; I swear to you that love, earthly felicity, domestic happiness, — I have sacrificed all to my project. For I also have my regenerating work ; only, instead of applying it to myself alone, I shall apply it to all the world."

"Fool ! poor fool ! " cried Althotas ; "I verily believe he is going to speak to me of his cataclysm of fleshworms, his revolutions of ant-hills, when I speak to him of life and eternal youth ! "

"Which can be acquired only at the price of a fearful crime ; and besides — "

"You doubt ; I see you doubt, unhappy man ! "

"No, Master ; but since you give up the idea of procuring a child, tell me what do you want ? "

"I must have the first virginal creature you can find, — man or woman ; but a woman would be better, by reason of the affinity of the sexes, as I have discovered. Find me that, and quickly, for I have only eight days longer."

"Very well, Master, I will see, — I will search."

Another lightning flash, more terrible than the first,

sparkled in the old man's eyes. "You will see! you will search!" he cried. "Oh! is that your reply? I expected it, and I don't know why I am surprised. And since when, thou worm of the earth, was the creature entitled to speak thus to its master? Ah! you see me powerless, disabled, supplicating, and you are fool enough to think me at your mercy! Yes or no, Acharat? And answer me without embarrassment or falsehood, for I can see and read your heart; for I can judge you, and shall punish you."

"Master," replied Balsamo, "take care; your anger will do you an injury."

"Answer me! answer!"

"I can say to my master only what is true; I will see if I can procure what you desire, without injuring ourselves. I will endeavor to find a man who will sell you what you want; but I will not take the crime upon myself. That is all I can say."

"That is very delicate," said Althotas, with a bitter smile.

"It is so, Master," said Balsamo.

Althotas made so violent an effort that with the help of his two arms resting on the arms of the chair, he raised himself to his feet. "Yes, or no?" said he.

"Master, yes, if I find it; no, if I do not."

"Then you will expose me to death, wretch! you will save three drops of the blood of an insignificant, worthless creature such as I require, and let a perfect creature such as I am fall into the eternal gulf! Listen, Acharat!" said the old man, with a smile fearful to behold, "I no longer ask you for anything; I ask absolutely nothing; I will wait. But if you do not obey, I will serve myself; if you desert me, I will help myself! You have heard me, have you not? Now go!"

Balsamo, without replying to this threat, prepared everything the old man might want. He placed the drinks and the food within his reach, and performed all the services a watchful servant would perform for his master, a devoted son for his father; then, absorbed by a thought very different from that which tormented Althotas, he lowered the trap to descend, without remarking that the old man followed him with a sardonic and ominous grin.

Althotas was still grinning like an evil genius when Balsamo stood before the still sleeping Lorenza.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STRUGGLE.

Balsamo stood before Lorenza, his heart swelling with sad emotion; his wrath had given place to sorrow. His interview with Althotas had led him to reflect on the vanity of all human affairs, and had driven anger from his heart. He remembered the practice of the Greek philosopher who repeated the entire alphabet before listening to the voice of that black divinity, the counsellor of Achilles. After a moment of mute and cold contemplation before the couch on which Lorenza was lying, "I am sad," said he to himself, "but resolved, and I can look my situation fair in the face. Lorenza hates me; Lorenza has threatened to betray me, and has betrayed me. My secret is no longer my own; I have given it into this woman's power, and she casts it to the winds. I am like the fox who has withdrawn from the steel trap only the bone of his leg, but who has left behind his flesh and his skin, so that the huntsman can say on the morrow, 'The fox has been taken here; I shall know him again, living or dead.'

"And this dreadful misfortune, which Althotas cannot comprehend, and which therefore I have not even mentioned to him, — this misfortune, which destroys all my hopes in this country, and consequently in this world, of which France is the soul, I owe to the creature sleeping before me, to this beautiful statue with her entrancing

smile. To this tempting angel I owe dishonor and ruin, and shall owe to her, captivity, exile, and death.

"Therefore," continued he, becoming more animated, "the sum of evil has exceeded that of good, and Lorenza is dangerous to me. Oh, serpent! with thy graceful folds, which nevertheless strangle, with thy golden throat, which is nevertheless full of venom, sleep on; for when thou awakest I shall be obliged to kill thee!"

And with a gloomy smile Balsamo slowly approached the young woman, whose languid eyes were turned toward him as he approached, as the sunflower and volubilis open to the first rays of the rising sun.

"Oh!" said Balsamo, "and yet I must forever close those eyes which now beam so tenderly on me, — those beautiful eyes which are filled with lightning as soon as they cease to glow with love."

Lorenza smiled sweetly, and, smiling, she displayed the double row of her pearly teeth.

"But if I kill her who hates me," said Balsamo, wringing his hands, "I shall also kill her who loves me;" and his heart was filled with the deepest grief, strangely mingled with a vague desire. "No, no!" he murmured. "I have sworn in vain; I have threatened in vain, — no, I shall never have the courage to kill her! She shall live, but she shall live without ever being awakened again! She shall live this factitious life, which is happiness for her, while the other is despair. Would that I could make her happy! What matters to me the rest? She shall have but one existence, that which I create, that in which she loves me, that in which she lives at this moment;" and he returned Lorenza's tender look by a look as tender as her own, placing his hand as he did so gently on her head.

Lorenza, who seemed to read Balsamo's thoughts as if they were an open book, gave a long sigh, rose gradually

with the graceful languor of sleep, and placed her two white arms upon Balsamo's shoulders, who felt her perfumed breath upon his cheek.

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Balsamo, passing his hand over his burning forehead and his dazzled eyes; "no, this intoxicating life will make me mad, and with this siren, glory, power, immortality, will all vanish from my thoughts. No, no, she must awake! I wish it; it is necessary."

Distracted, beside himself, Balsamo suddenly shook off Lorenza, who loosened her hold upon him, and, like a floating veil, like a shadow, like a flake of snow, she fell on the sofa. The most finished coquette would not have chosen an attitude more seductive in which to present herself to her lover's view. Balsamo still had the strength to take a few steps in retreat; but, like Orpheus, he looked back, — like Orpheus, he was lost. "Oh, if I awake her," he thought, "the struggle will begin again! If I awake her, she will kill herself, or she will kill me, or force me to destroy her. Oh, what an abyss! Yes, this woman's destiny is written; it stands before me in letters of fire, — love, death! Lorenza, Lorenza! thou art doomed to love and to die! Lorenza, Lorenza! I hold thy life and thy love in my hands!"

Instead of a reply, the enchantress rose, advanced toward Balsamo, fell at his feet, and gazed into his eyes with a tender smile. Then she took one of his hands and placed it on her heart. "Death!" said she, in a low voice, with lips moist and brilliant as coral when it issues from the caverns of the deep; "death, but love!"

Balsamo took two steps backward, his head thrown back, his hand over his eyes. Lorenza, breathless, followed him on her knees. "Death!" she repeated, with her intoxicating voice, "but love, love, love!"

Balsamo could resist no longer; a cloud of flame enveloped him. "Oh!" he said, "it is too much; I have struggled as long as a human being could struggle. Demon, or angel of futurity, whichever thou art, thou must be content. I have long enough sacrificed all the generous passions in my heart to egotism and pride. Oh, no, no! I have no right thus to rebel against the only human sentiment which lives in my heart. I love this woman; I love her, and this passionate love injures her more than the most terrible hatred could do. This love kills her. Oh, coward! oh, ferocious fool that I am! I cannot even compromise with my desires. What! when I breathe my last sigh, when I appear before God, — I, the deceiver, the false prophet, — when I throw off my mantle of hypocrisy before the Sovereign Judge, shall I not have one generous action to confess, the recollection of a single happiness to console me in the midst of my eternal sufferings? Oh, no, no, Lorenza! I know that in loving thee I lose the future; I know that my revealing angel will wing its flight to heaven when once the woman shall descend into my arms. But, Lorenza, you wish it, do you not?"

"My beloved!" she sighed.

"Then you accept this life instead of the real life?"

"I ask for it on my knees, — I pray for it, I implore it. This life is love and happiness."

"And will it suffice for you when you are my wife? For you know that I love you passionately."

"Oh! I know it, — I can read your heart."

"And you will never accuse me, before men or before God, of having taken you by surprise, or of having deceived you?"

"Never! Oh! before men, before God, on the contrary, I will bless you for giving me love, — the only good, the only pearl, the only diamond in the world!"

"You will never regret your wings, poor dove? For you must know that you will never again roam through radiant space for me to seek the ray of light Jehovah once deigned to bestow upon his prophets. When I would know the future, when I would command men, alas! alas! your voice will no longer reply to me. I have had in you the beloved woman and the helping spirit; I shall have only one of the two now; and yet —"

"Ah! you doubt, you doubt," cried Lorenza; "I see doubt like a dark stain upon your heart."

"You will always love me, Lorenza?"

"Always! always!"

Balsamo passed his hand over his forehead.

"Well! so be it," said he. "Besides —" He remained a moment buried in thought. "Besides, am I in absolute need of her?" he continued. "Is she the only one in the world? No, no; while this one will make me happy, the other will continue my riches and my power. Andrée is as prophetic, as clairvoyant as you are. Andrée is young, pure, virginal, and I do not love her; and yet in her sleep Andrée is obedient to me, like you. I have in Andrée a subject ready to replace you; and to me she is the physician's *corpus vile* which may serve for experiments. She flies as far as you do — farther, perhaps — into the shadows of the unknown. Andrée, Andrée! I take you for my kingdom. Lorenza, come to my arms; I keep you for my love and my mistress. With Andrée I am powerful; with Lorenza I am happy. From this moment, only, my life is complete, and, except for immortality, I have realized the dream of Althotas, — except for immortality, I am equal to the gods!" and raising Lorenza, he opened his panting bosom, to which she clung as the ivy clings to the oak.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LOVE.

For Balsamo another life had begun, — a life hitherto unknown in his active, troubled, multifarious experience. For three days there had been for him no more anger, no more apprehension, no more jealousy; for three days he had not heard the subject of politics, conspirators, or conspiracies as much as whispered. By Lorenza's side — and he had not left her for an instant — he had forgotten the whole world. This strange, wonderful love, which, as it were, soared above humanity, this intoxicating and mysterious love, this love of a shadow, — for he could not conceal from himself that with a word he could change his gentle bride into an implacable enemy, — this love snatched from hatred, thanks to an inexplicable caprice of nature or of science, plunged Balsamo into happiness which bordered on madness.

More than once during these three days, rousing himself from the opiate torpor of love, Balsamo looked at his ever-smiling, ever-ecstatic companion, — for thenceforth, in the existence he had created for her, she rested from her life of factitious ecstasy by a sleep equally factitious; and when he saw her calm, gentle, happy, when she called him by the most affectionate names, and dreamed aloud her mysterious love, he more than once asked himself if God were not angry with the modern Titan who had attempted to wrest from him his secrets; if he had not inspired Lorenza with the idea of deceiving him with a false-

hood in order to lull his vigilance, and when it was lulled, of escaping, to appear again as an avenging fury.

In such moments Balsamo doubted the truth of a science received by tradition from antiquity, but of which he had no evidence but examples. Immediately, however, that perpetual flame, that thirst for caresses, reassured him. "If Lorenza was feigning," he argued with himself, "if she intended to fly from me, she would seek opportunities for sending me away, she would invent excuses for occasional solitude; but far from that, her arms are always embracing me, her ardent look says to me, 'Do not go away;' her gentle voice ever whispers, 'Stay!'"

Then Balsamo's confidence in himself and in science returned. Why, indeed, should the magic secret to which alone he owned his power have become all at once, and without any transition, a chimera fit only to throw to the winds as a vanished recollection, as the smoke of an extinguished fire? Never with relation to him had Lorenza been more lucid, more clear-sighted. All the thoughts which sprang up in his mind, all the feelings which made his heart bound, were instantly reproduced in hers. It remained to be seen if this lucidity were not sympathy; if, beyond himself and the young girl, beyond the circle which their love had traced, and which their love illuminated with its light, the eyes of her soul, so clear-sighted before the fall of this new Eve, could yet pierce the surrounding darkness. Balsamo dared not make the decisive trial; he hoped still, and this hope was the resplendent crown of his happiness.

Sometimes Lorenza said to him, with gentle melancholy: "Acharat, you think of another than me, of a woman of the North, with fair hair and blue eyes. Acharat, Acharat, this woman always moves beside me in your thoughts!"

Balsamo looked tenderly at Lorenza. "You see that in me?" said he.

"Oh, yes! as clearly as I read the surface of a mirror."

"Then you know it is not love which makes me think of that woman," replied Balsamo. "Read in my heart, dear Lorenza!"

"No," she replied, bending her head; "no, I know it well. But yet your thoughts are divided between us two, as in the days when Lorenza Feliciani tormented you, — the naughty Lorenza, who sleeps, and whom you will not again awake."

"No, my love, no," exclaimed Balsamo; "I think only of you, — at least with the heart. Have I not forgotten all, neglected everything, — study, politics, work, — since our happiness?"

"And you are wrong," said Lorenza; "for I can help you in your work."

"How?"

"Yes; did you not formerly spend whole hours in your laboratory?"

"Certainly. But I renounce all these vain endeavors. They would be so many hours taken from my life; for during that time I should not see you."

"And why should I not be with you in your labors as in your love? Why should I not make you powerful as I make you happy?"

"Because my Lorenza, it is true, is beautiful, but she has not studied. God gives beauty and love, but study alone gives knowledge."

"The soul knows everything."

"Then you can really see with the eyes of your soul?"

"Yes."

"And you can guide me in the grand search after the philosopher's stone?"

"I think so."

"Come, then;" and Balsamo, encircling her waist with his arm, led her into his laboratory. The fire in the gigantic furnace, which no one had replenished for four days, was extinguished, and the crucibles had grown cold upon their chafing-dishes.

Lorenza looked around on all these strange instruments, the last combinations of expiring alchemy, without surprise. She seemed to know the purpose which each was intended to fulfil. "You are attempting to make gold?" said she, smiling.

"Yes."

"All these crucibles contain preparations in different stages of progress."

"All stopped, — all lost; but I do not regret it."

"You are right, for your gold would never be anything but colored mercury; you can render it solid, perhaps, but you cannot transform it."

"But gold can be made?"

"No."

"And yet Daniel of Transylvania sold the receipt for the transmutation of metals to Cosmo the First for twenty thousand ducats."

"Daniel of Transylvania deceived Cosmo the First."

"And yet the Saxon Payken, who was condemned to death by Charles the Second, ransomed his life by changing a leaden ingot into a golden one, from which forty ducats were coined, and gold enough was taken to make a medal, which was struck in honor of the clever alchemist."

"The clever alchemist was nothing but a clever juggler. He merely substituted the golden ingot for the leaden

one, — nothing more. Your surest way of making gold, Acharat, is to melt into ingots, as you do already, the riches which your slaves bring you from the four quarters of the world."

Balsamo remained pensive. "Then the transmutation of metals is impossible?" said he.

"Impossible."

"And the diamond, — is that, too, impossible?"

"Oh! the diamond is another matter," said Lorenza.

"The diamond can be made, then?"

"Yes; for to make the diamond, you have not to transmute one body into another, — to make the diamond is merely to attempt the simple modification of a known element."

"Then you know the element of which the diamond is formed?"

"To be sure; the diamond is pure carbon crystallized."

Balsamo was almost stunned. A dazzling, unexpected, unheard-of light flashed before his eyes; he covered them with both hands, as if the flame had blinded him.

"Oh! my God," said he, "my God, thou dost for me too much; some danger threatens me! What precious ring must I throw into the sea to appease thy jealousy? Enough, Lorenza, for to-day!"

"Am I not yours? Order, command me!"

"Yes, you are mine. Come, come!"

And he drew her out of the laboratory, crossed the chamber of furs, and without paying any attention to a light, creaking noise he heard overhead, he once more entered the barred room with Lorenza.

"So you are pleased with your Lorenza, my beloved Balsamo?"

"Oh!" he exclaimed.

"What did you fear, then? Speak, — tell me all."

Balsamo clasped his hands, and looked at Lorenza with an expression of such terror that a spectator ignorant of what was in his heart would have been totally at a loss to account for it.

"Oh!" he murmured, "and I was near killing this angel; I was near dying of despair before resolving the problem of being at once powerful and happy! I forgot that the limits of the possible always exceed the horizon traced by the existing state of science, and that the majority of truths which have become facts have always in their infancy been looked upon as dreams. I thought I knew everything, and I knew nothing!"

The young Italian smiled divinely.

"Lorenza, Lorenza!" continued Balsamo, "the mysterious design of the Creator is, then, accomplished, which makes woman to be born of the substance of the man, and which commands them to have only one heart in common! Eve is revived for me, — an Eve who will not have a thought that is not mine, and whose life hangs by the thread which I hold. It is too much, my God, for a creature to possess! I sink under the weight of thy gift!" and he fell upon his knees, embracing with adoration the gentle beauty, who smiled on him as none smile on earth.

"Oh, no!" he continued; "no, you shall never leave me more! I shall live in all safety under the protection of your clairvoyance, which can pierce into the future. You will assist me in those laborious researches which you alone, as you have said, can complete, and which one word from you will render easy and successful. You will show me, — since I cannot make gold, gold being a homogeneous substance, a primitive element, — you will show me in what corner of the world the Creator has concealed it; you will tell me where the rich treasures lie which have

been swallowed up in the vast depths of the ocean. With your eyes I shall see the pearl grow in the veined shell, and man's thoughts spring up under the thick layers of his flesh. With your ears I shall hear the dull sound of the worm beneath the ground, and the footsteps of my enemy as he approaches! I shall be great as God, and happier than God, my Lorenza; for God has not in heaven his equal and companion, — for God is almighty, but he is alone in his divine majesty, and does not share with any other divine being that almightiness which makes him God."

Lorenza still smiled upon him, and as she smiled she replied to his words by affectionate caresses. "And yet," she whispered, as if she could see each thought which whirled through his restless brain, "and yet you doubt still, Acharat, as you have said, if I can cross the circle of our love, — you doubt if I can see into the distance; but you console yourself by thinking that if I cannot see, she can."

"She! Who?"

"The fair-haired beauty. Shall I tell you her name?"

"Yes."

"Stay, — Andrée!"

"Ah, yes; you can read my thoughts! Yes, a last fear still troubles me. Can you still see through space, though material obstacles intervene?"

"Try me."

"Give me your hand, Lorenza."

The young girl passionately seized Balsamo's hand.

"Can you follow me?"

"Anywhere?"

"Come!" and Balsamo, leaving in thought the Rue Saint Claude, drew Lorenza's thoughts along with him.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"We are upon a hill," replied the young woman.

"Yes, you are right," said Balsamo, trembling with delight. "But what do you see?"

"Before me?—to the right, or to the left?"

"Before you."

"I see a long valley, with a wood on one side, a town on the other, and a river which separates them and loses itself in the horizon, after flowing under the walls of a large chateau."

"That is right, Lorenza. The forest is that of Vésinet; the town St. Germain; the chateau is the Château de Maisons. Let us enter the pavilion behind us. What do you see there?"

"Ah! in the first place, in the antechamber, a little negro, fantastically dressed, eating sugar-plums."

"Yes, Zamore. Proceed, proceed!"

"An empty salon, splendidly furnished; the spaces above the doors painted with goddesses and cupids."

"The salon is empty, you say?"

"Yes."

"Let us go still farther."

"Ah! we are in a splendid boudoir, lined with blue satin embroidered with flowers of natural colors."

"Is that empty also?"

"No; a woman is reclining upon a sofa."

"What woman? Do you not remember to have seen her before?"

"Yes; it is the Comtesse Dubarry."

"Right, Lorenza! I shall go frantic with delight! What does the woman do?"

"She is thinking of you, Balsamo."

"Of me?"

"Yes."

"Then you can read her thoughts?"

"Yes, for I repeat it, she is thinking of you."

"And what is she thinking?"

"You have made her a promise."

"Yes."

"You promised her that water of beauty which Venus, to revenge herself on Sappho, gave to Phaon."

"Yes, yes, you are right again! And what does she do while thinking?"

"She comes to a decision."

"What decision?"

"She reaches out her hand toward the bell; she rings; another young woman enters."

"Dark or light haired?"

"Dark."

"Tall or short?"

"Short."

"Her sister. Listen to what she says to her."

"She orders the horses to be harnessed to her carriage."

"To go whither?"

"To come here."

"Are you sure?"

"She is giving the order. Stay,—she is obeyed; I see the horses and the carriage. In two hours she will be here."

Balsamo fell upon his knees. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "if in two hours she should really be here, I shall have nothing left to ask of thee, my God, except to have mercy on my happiness."

"My poor friend! then you still feared?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And why did you fear? Love, which completes the material existence, increases also our mental powers. Love, like every generous emotion, brings us nearer to God, and all wisdom comes from God."

"Lorenza, Lorenza, you will drive me mad with joy!" said Balsamo, letting his head fall on Lorenza's knees.

Balsamo now waited for but one more proof to be completely happy.

This proof was the arrival of Madame Dubarry. The two hours of suspense were short. All measure of time had completely ceased for Balsamo. Suddenly the young woman started, and took Balsamo's hand. "You are doubting yet," said she, "and you wish to know where she is at this moment."

"Yes," said Balsamo, "you are right."

"Well," replied Lorenza, "she is thundering along the Boulevards at the full speed of her horses; she approaches; she turns into the Rue Saint Claude; she stops before the door and knocks."

The apartment in which they were, was so retired and so quiet that the noise of the iron knocker could not penetrate its recesses; but Balsamo, rising on one knee, was anxiously listening. At this moment two knocks struck by Fritz made him bound to his feet; for, as the reader will remember, two knocks were the signal of an important visit.

"Oh!" said he, "then it is true?"

"Go and convince yourself, Balsamo; but return quickly."

Balsamo advanced toward the fireplace.

"Let me accompany you," said Lorenza, "as far as the door of the staircase."

"Come!" and they both passed together into the chamber of furs.

"You will not leave this room?" asked Balsamo.

"No; I will await you here. Oh! do not fear; you know the Lorenza who loves you is not the Lorenza whom you fear. Besides—" She stopped, and smiled.

"What?" asked Balsamo.

"Can you not read in my soul as I read yours?"

"Alas! no."

"Besides, you can command me to sleep until you return. Command me to remain immovable upon this sofa, and I shall sleep, and be motionless."

"Well, my Lorenza, it shall be so. Sleep, and await my return here!"

Lorenza, already struggling with sleep, pressed her lips to Balsamo's in a last kiss, and fell back upon the sofa, murmuring: "You will return soon, my Balsamo, will you not?"

Balsamo waved his hand. Lorenza was already asleep; but so beautiful, so pure, with her long, flowing hair, the feverish glow upon her cheeks, her half-opened and swimming eyes, so little like a mortal, that Balsamo came back to her, took her hand, kissed her arms and her neck, but dared not kiss her lips.

Two knocks were heard a second time. The lady was becoming impatient, or Fritz feared that his master had not heard him. Balsamo hastened to the door. As he closed it behind him, he thought he heard a second creaking noise like the former one. He opened the door again, looked round, and saw nothing, — nothing but Lorenza lying down, and breathing quickly under the pressure of her love. He closed the door, and hastened toward the salon without uneasiness, without fear, without foreboding, — all heaven in his heart!

Balsamo was mistaken; it was not love alone which oppressed Lorenza's bosom and made her breathe so heavily. It was a kind of dream which seemed to belong to the lethargy in which she was plunged, — a lethargy which so nearly resembled death.

Lorenza dreamed, and in the hideous mirror of her

gloomy dreams she fancied she saw, through the darkness which began to close around her, the oaken ceiling open, and something like a large circular platform descend slowly, with a regular, slow, measured movement, accompanied by a disagreeable hissing noise. It seemed to her as if she breathed with difficulty, as if she were almost suffocated by the pressure of this moving circle. It seemed to her as if upon this moving trap something moved, — some misshapen being like Caliban in "The Tempest," — a monster with a human face, an old man whose eyes and arms alone were living, and who looked at her with his frightful eyes, and stretched his fleshless arms toward her. And she — she, poor child! — writhed in vain, without power to escape, without understanding the danger which threatened her, without consciouness of anything but the grasp of two living flesh-hooks seizing upon her white dress, lifting her from her sofa, and placing her upon the trap, which reascended slowly toward the ceiling with the grating noise of iron scraping against iron, and with a hideous, mocking laugh from the monster with the human face, who was raising her aloft without shock and without pain.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PHILTRE.

As Lorenza had foretold, it was Madame Dubarry who had just knocked at the gate. The beautiful countess had been ushered into the salon. While awaiting Balsamo's arrival, she was looking over that curious "Book of Death," engraved at Mayence, the plates of which, designed with marvellous skill, show death presiding over all the acts of man's life, — waiting for him at the door of the ball-room after he has pressed the hand of the woman he loves, dragging him to the bottom of the water in which he is bathing, or hiding in the barrel of the gun he carries to the chase.

Madame Dubarry was contemplating the plate which represents a beautiful woman daubing her face with rouge and looking at herself in the glass, when Balsamo opened the door and bowed to her, with the smile of happiness still beaming upon his face. "Excuse me, Madame," said he, "for having made you wait; but I had not well calculated the distance, or was ignorant of the speed of your horses. I thought you still at the Place Louis XV."

"What do you mean?" asked the countess. "You knew I was coming, then?"

"Yes, Madame; it is about two hours ago that I saw you, in your blue satin boudoir, giving orders for your horses to be put to the carriage."

"And you say I was in my blue satin boudoir?"

"Embroidered with flowers colored after nature. Yes, Countess, you were reclining upon a sofa; a pleasing thought passed through your mind. You said to yourself, 'I will go and visit the Comte de Fenix;' then you rang the bell."

"And who entered?"

"Your sister, Countess. Am I right? You requested her to transmit your orders, which were instantly executed."

"Truly, Count, you are a sorcerer! Can you look into my boudoir like that every moment of the day? If so, you should have warned me, do you see?"

"Ah! be assured, Countess, I can look only through open doors."

"And looking through open doors, you saw that I was thinking of you?"

"Yes; and even that you thought of me with benevolent intentions."

"Ah, you are right, my dear Count! I have the best possible intentions toward you; but confess that you deserve more than intentions, — you who are so kind and so useful, and who seem destined to play in my life the part of tutor, which is the most difficult part, I know."

"In truth, Madame, you make me very happy! Then I have been of use to you?"

"What! you are a sorcerer, and you do not know?"

"Allow me at least the merit of being modest."

"As you please, my dear Count; then I will first speak of what I have done for you."

"I cannot permit it, Madame; on the contrary, speak of yourself, I beseech you!"

"Well, my dear Count, in the first place, give me that talisman which renders one invisible; for on my journey hither, rapid as it was, I thought I recognized one of Monsieur de Richelieu's grays."

"And this gray?"

"Followed my carriage, carrying on his back a courier."

"What do you think of this circumstance, and for what purpose could the duke have caused you to be followed?"

"With the intention of playing me some scurvy trick. Modest as you are, my dear Comte de Fenix, you must be aware that Nature has gifted you with personal advantages enough to make a king jealous of my visits to you, or of yours to me."

"Monsieur de Richelieu cannot be dangerous to you in any way, Madame," replied Balsamo.

"But he was so, my dear Count; he was dangerous before this last event."

Balsamo comprehended that there was a secret concealed beneath these words which Lorenza had not yet revealed to him. He did not therefore venture on the unknown ground, and replied merely by a smile.

"He was indeed," repeated the countess; "and I was near falling a victim to a most skilfully constructed plot, — a plot in which you also had some share, Count."

"I, engaged in a plot against you? Never, Madame!"

"Was it not you who gave the Duc de Richelieu the philtre?"

"What philtre?"

"A draught which causes the most ardent love."

"No, Madame; Monsieur de Richelieu composes those draughts himself, for he has long known the receipt. I merely gave him a simple narcotic."

"Ah! really?"

"Upon my honor!"

"And on what day did Monsieur de Richelieu ask for this narcotic? Remember the date, Count; it is of importance."

"Madame, it was last Saturday, — the day previous to that on which I had the honor of sending you, through Fritz, the note requesting you to meet me at the house of Monsieur de Sartines."

"The eve of that day!" exclaimed the countess. "The eve of the day on which the king was seen going to see little Taverney? Oh! now everything is explained."

"Then, if all is explained, you see I gave only the narcotic."

"Yes, it is the narcotic which saved us."

This time Balsamo waited; he was profoundly ignorant of the subject.

"I am delighted, Madame," he replied, "to have been useful to you, even unintentionally."

"Oh! you are always kindness itself. But you can do more for me than you have ever yet done. Oh, doctor! I have been very ill, politically speaking, and even now I can scarcely believe in my recovery."

"Madame," said Balsamo, "the doctor, since there is a doctor in the case, always requires the details of the illness he is to cure. Will you give me the exact particulars of what you have experienced? — and if possible, do not forget a single symptom."

"Nothing can be more simple, my dear doctor, or dear sorcerer, whichever you prefer. The eve of the day on which this narcotic was used, his Majesty refused to accompany me to Luciennes. He remained, like a deceiver as he is, at Trianon, pretending fatigue; and yet, as I have since learned, he supped at Trianon with the Duc de Richelieu and the Baron de Taverney."

"Ha!"

"Now you understand. At supper the love-draught was given to the king. He was already captivated by Mademoiselle Andrée; it was known that he would not see me

the next day; it was therefore with reference to that young lady that the philtre was to operate."

"Well, what happened?"

"Oh! that is difficult to discover positively. The king was seen going in the direction of the offices of Trianon, — that is to say, toward Mademoiselle Andrée's apartment."

"I know where she lives; but what followed?"

"Ah! 'What followed?' *Peste*, how fast you are, Count. The king cannot be followed without risk when he wishes to conceal himself."

"But, in short?"

"In short, all I can tell you is that his Majesty returned to Trianon through a fearful storm, pale, trembling, and feverish, — almost on the verge of delirium."

"And you think," said Balsamo, smiling, "that it was not the storm alone which alarmed his Majesty?"

"No, for the valet heard him cry several times, 'Dead, dead, dead!'"

"Oh!" said Balsamo.

"It was the narcotic," continued Madame Dubarry. "Nothing alarms the king so much as death, and next to death its semblance. He had found Mademoiselle de Taverney sleeping a strange sleep, and must have thought her dead."

"Yes, yes; dead indeed," said Balsamo, who remembered having fled without awakening Andrée, —"dead, or at least presenting all the appearance of death. Yes, yes, — it must be so. Well, Madame, and what then?"

"No one knows, then, what happened that night, or rather, in the first part of the night. The king, on his return, was attacked by a violent fever and a nervous trembling, which did not leave him until the morning, when it occurred to the dauphiness to open the shutters and show his Majesty a lovely morning, with the sun

shining upon merry faces. Then all these unknown visions disappeared with the night which had produced them. At noon the king was better, took some broth, and ate a partridge's wing; and in the evening — "

"And in the evening —?" repeated Balsamo.

"In the evening," continued Madame Dubarry, "his Majesty, who no doubt would not stay at Trianon after his fright, came to see me at Luciennes, where, dear Count, I discovered, upon my word, that Monsieur de Richelieu was almost as great a sorcerer as you are."

The triumphant countenance and graceful but roguish look of the countess reassured Balsamo as to the power the favorite yet exercised over the king. "Then you are satisfied with me, Madame?" he asked.

"Delighted, Count! and when you spoke of impossibilities you could create, you told the exact truth;" and in token of thanks she gave him her soft, white, perfumed hand, which was not so fresh as Lorenza's, but whose warmth had also its own eloquence.

"And now, Count, let us speak of yourself."

Balsamo bowed like a man ready to listen.

"If you have preserved me from a great danger," continued Madame Dubarry, "I think I have also saved you from no inconsiderable peril."

"Me!" said Balsamo, concealing his emotion. "I do not require that to feel grateful to you; but yet, be good enough to inform me what — "

"Yes. The coffer in question — "

"Well, Madame?"

"Contained a multitude of ciphers, which Monsieur de Sartines caused all his clerks to translate. All signed their several translations, executed apart, and all gave the same result. In consequence of this, Monsieur de Sartines arrived at Versailles this morning while I was there, bring-

ing with him all these translations and the dictionary of diplomatic ciphers."

"Ha! — and what did the king say?"

"The king seemed surprised at first, then alarmed. His Majesty easily listens to those who speak to him of danger. Since the stab of Damiens' penknife, there is one word which is ever eagerly hearkened to by Louis XV., — it is, 'Take care!'"

"Then you say that Monsieur de Sartines accused me of plotting?"

"At first Monsieur de Sartines endeavored to make me leave the room; but I refused, declaring that as no one was more attached to his Majesty than myself, no one had a right to make me leave him when danger was in question. Monsieur de Sartines insisted, but I resisted; and the king, smiling and looking at me in a manner I know well, said, 'Let her remain, Sartines; I can refuse her nothing to-day.'

"Then you understand, Count, that as I was present, Monsieur de Sartines, remembering our adieu, so clearly expressed, feared to displease me by attacking you. He therefore spoke of the evil designs of the King of Prussia toward France; of the disposition prevalent to facilitate the march of rebellion by supernatural means. In a word, he accused a great many people, proving always by the papers he held that these persons were guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"Of what! Count, ought I to disclose secrets of State?"

"Which are our secrets, Madame. Oh, you risk nothing! I think it is my interest not to speak."

"Yes, Count, I know that Monsieur de Sartines wished to prove that a numerous and powerful sect, composed of bold, skilful, resolute agents, were silently undermining

the respect due to the king, by spreading certain reports concerning his Majesty."

"What reports?"

"Saying, for instance, that his Majesty was accused of starving his people."

"To which the king replied —"

"As the king always replies, by a joke."

Balsamo breathed again.

"And what was the joke?" he asked.

"'Since I am accused of starving the people,' said he, 'there is only one reply to make to the accusation, — let us feed them.' 'How so, Sire?' said Monsieur de Sartines. 'I will take the charge of feeding all those who spread this report, and moreover will give them safe lodging in my chateau of the Bastille.'"

A slight shudder passed through Balsamo's limbs, but he retained his smiling countenance. "What followed?" he asked.

"Then the king seemed to consult me by a smile. 'Sire,' said I, 'I can never believe that those little black characters which Monsieur de Sartines has brought to you mean that you are a bad king.' Then the lieutenant of police exclaimed loudly. 'Any more,' I added, 'than they prove that your clerks can read.'"

"And what did the king say, Countess?" asked Balsamo.

"That I might be right, but that Monsieur de Sartines was not wrong."

"Well, and then?"

"Then a great many *lettres-de-cachet* were made out, and I saw that Monsieur de Sartines tried to slip among them one for you; but I stood firm, and arrested him by a single word. 'Monsieur,' I said aloud, and before the king, 'arrest all Paris, if you like, — that is your business;

but you had better reflect a little before you lay a finger on one of my friends. If not —' 'Oh, ho!' said the king, 'she is getting angry; take care, Sartines!' 'But, Sire, the interest of the kingdom —' 'Oh, you are not a Sully!' said I, crimson with rage; 'and I am not a Gabrielle.' 'Madame, they intend to assassinate the king, as Henri IV. was assassinated!' For the first time the king turned pale, trembled, and put his hand to his head. I feared I was vanquished. 'Sire,' said I, 'you must let Monsieur de Sartines have his own way; for his clerks have no doubt read in these ciphers that I also am conspiring against you;' and I left the room. But, bless me, it was the morning after the philtre, my dear Count! The king preferred my company to that of Monsieur de Sartines, and ran after me. 'Ah, for pity's sake, my dear Countess,' said he, 'pray do not get angry!' 'Then send away that horrid man, Sire; he smells of dungeons.' 'Go, Sartines; off with you!' said the king, shrugging his shoulders. 'And for the future I forbid you, not only to visit me, but even to bow to me,' added I. At this blow our magistrate became alarmed; he approached me, and humbly kissed my hand. 'Well,' said he, 'so be it; let us speak no more of it, fair lady. But you will ruin the State. Since you absolutely insist upon it, your protégé shall be respected by my agents.'"

Balsamo seemed plunged in a deep revery.

"Well," said the countess, "so you do not even thank me for having saved you from the pleasure of lodging in the Bastille, which perhaps might have been unjust, but assuredly no less disagreeable on that account?"

Balsamo made no reply. He drew a small phial, filled with a fluid red as blood, from his pocket. "Hold, Madame!" said he; "for the liberty you have procured for me, I give you twenty years' additional youth!"

The countess slipped the phial into her bosom, and took her leave joyous and triumphant. Balsamo still remained thinking. "They might perhaps have been saved," said he, "but for the coquetry of a woman. This courtesan's little foot dashes them down into the depths of the abyss. Decidedly, God is with us!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

BLOOD.

The door had no sooner closed upon Madame Dubarry than Balsamo ascended the secret staircase and entered the chamber of furs. The conversation with the countess had been long, and for two reasons he was impatient. The first was the desire to see Lorenza; the second, the fear that she might be fatigued, for in the new life he had given her there was no room for *ennui*. She might be fatigued, inasmuch as she might pass, as she sometimes did, from the magnetic sleep to ecstasy; and to this ecstatic state always succeeded those nervous crises which prostrated Lorenza's strength, if a new supply of the regenerating fluid did not restore the necessary equilibrium among the various functions of her organization.

Balsamo, then, having entered and closed the door, immediately glanced at the couch where he had left Lorenza. She was no longer there. Only the fine shawl of cashmere embroidered with golden flowers, which had enveloped her like a scarf, was still lying upon the cushions, as an evidence that she had been in the room and had been reclining on them.

Balsamo stood motionless, gazing at the empty sofa. Perhaps Lorenza had felt herself incommoded by a strange odor which seemed to have filled the room since he left it; perhaps, by a mechanical movement, she had usurped some of the functions of actual life, and instinctively changed her place.

Balsamo's first idea was that Lorenza had returned to the laboratory, whither she had accompanied him a short time previously. He entered the laboratory. At the first glance it seemed empty; but in the shadow of the gigantic furnace, or behind the Oriental tapestry, a woman could easily conceal herself. He raised the tapestry, therefore; he made the circuit of the furnace; nowhere could he discover even a trace of Lorenza. There remained only the young girl's chamber, to which she had, no doubt, returned; for this chamber was a prison to her only in her waking state. He hastened to the chamber, and found the secret door closed. This was no proof that Lorenza had not entered. Nothing was more probable, in fact, than that Lorenza, in her lucid sleep, had remembered the mechanism, and remembering it, had obeyed the hallucination of a dream barely effaced from her mind. Balsamo pressed the spring. The chamber was empty, like the laboratory; it did not appear as if Lorenza had even entered it.

Then a heart-rending thought — a thought which, it will be remembered, had already stung his heart — chased away all the suppositions, all the hopes of the happy lover. Lorenza had been playing a part; she must have feigned to sleep in order to banish all distrust, all uneasiness, all watchfulness from her husband's mind; and at the first opportunity had fled again, this time with surer precautions, warned as she had been by a first, or rather by two former experiences.

At this idea Balsamo started up and rang for Fritz. Then, as Fritz, to his impatient mind, seemed to delay, he hastened to meet him, and found him on the secret staircase. "The signora?" said he.

"Well, Master?" said Fritz, seeing by Balsamo's agitation that something extraordinary had taken place.

"Have you seen her?"

"No, Master."

"She has not gone?"

"From where?"

"From this house, to be sure!"

"No one has left the house but the countess, behind whom I have just closed the gate."

Balsamo rushed up the stairs again like a madman. Then he fancied that the giddy young creature, so different in her sleep from what she was when waking, had concealed herself in a moment of childish playfulness; that from the corner where she was hid she was now reading his heart, and amusing herself by terrifying him, in order to reassure him afterward. Then he began a minute search. Not a nook was omitted, not a closet forgotten, not a screen left in its proper place. There was something in this search of Balsamo's like the frantic efforts of a man blinded by passion, alternating with the feeble and tottering gait of a drunkard. He could then only stretch out his arms and cry, "Lorenza, Lorenza!" hoping that the adored creature would rush forth suddenly, and throw herself into his arms with an exclamation of joy. But silence alone, a gloomy and uninterrupted silence, replied to his extravagant thoughts and mad appeals.

In running wildly about, dashing aside the furniture, shouting to the naked walls, calling Lorenza, staring without seeing any object or forming a single coherent thought, Balsamo passed three minutes — that is to say, three centuries — of agony.

He recovered by degrees from this half-insane hallucination, dipped his hand in a vase of iced water, moistened his temples, and pressing one hand in the other, as if to force himself to be cool, he chased back by his iron will the blood which was beating wildly against his brain, with

that fatal, incessant, monotonous movement which indicates life when there is merely motion and silence, but which is a sign of death or madness when it becomes tumultuous and perceptible.

"Come!" said he, "let me reason. Lorenza is not here, — no more false pretences with myself. Lorenza is not here; she must be gone, — yes, gone, quite gone!" And he looked around once more, and once more shouted her name. "Gone!" he continued. "In vain Fritz asserts that he has not seen her. She is gone, — gone! Two cases present themselves: Either he has not seen Lorenza, — and, after all, that is possible, for man is liable to error, — or he has seen her, and has been bribed by her. Fritz bribed! Why not? In vain does his past fidelity plead against this supposition. If Lorenza, if love, if science, could so deeply deceive and lie, why should the frail nature of a fallible human being not deceive also? Oh, I will know all! I will know all! Is there not Mademoiselle de Taverney left? Yes, through Andrée I shall know if Fritz has betrayed me, if Lorenza is false! And this time, — oh! this time as love has proved false, as science has proved an error, as fidelity has become a snare, — oh! this time Balsamo will punish without pity, without sparing, like a strong man who revenges himself, who chases pity from his heart, and keeps only pride. Let me see; the first step is to leave this as quickly as possible, not to let Fritz suspect anything, and to fly to Trianon."

Balsamo, seizing his hat, which had rolled on the floor, rushed toward the door. But suddenly he stopped. "Oh!" said he, "before anything else — my God! poor old man, I had forgotten him — I must see Althotas. During my delirium, during this spasm of forced and unnatural love, I have neglected the unfortunate old man; I have been ungrateful and inhuman!"

And, with the feverishness which now animated all his movements, Balsamo approached the spring which put in motion the trap in the ceiling, and the movable scaffold quickly descended. He placed himself upon it, and, aided by the counterpoise, mounted again, still overwhelmed by the anguish of his mind and heart, and without thinking of anything but Lorenza. Scarcely had he attained the level of the floor, when the voice of Althotas struck upon his ear, and roused him from his gloomy revery.

But, to Balsamo's great astonishment, the old man's first words were not reproaches, as he had expected; he was received with an outburst of simple and natural gayety. The pupil looked with an astonished gaze upon his master.

The old man was reclining upon his spring-chair. He breathed noisily and with delight, as if at each inspiration he added a day to his life; his eyes, full of a gloomy fire, but the expression of which was enlivened by the smile upon his lips, were fixed eagerly upon his visitor.

Balsamo summoned up all his strength and collected his ideas, in order to conceal his grief from his master, who had so little indulgence for human weaknesses. During this moment of reflection he felt a strange oppression weigh upon his breast. No doubt the air was vitiated by being too constantly breathed, for a heavy, dull, close, nauseous odor, like the one he had already noticed below, but there in a slighter degree, floated in the air, and like the vapors which rise from lakes and marshes in autumn at sunrise and sunset, had taken substance and rested on the windows.

In this dense and acrid atmosphere Balsamo's heart throbbed, his head felt confused, a vertigo seized upon him, and he felt that respiration and strength were fast

failing him. "Master," said he, seeking some object on which to support himself, and endeavoring to dilate his lungs, — "Master, you cannot live here; there is no air."

"You think so?"

"Oh!"

"Nevertheless, I breathe very well in it," replied Althotas, gayly, "and I live as you see!"

"Master, Master!" replied Balsamo, growing more and more giddy, "let me open a window! It rises from the floor like an exhalation of blood!"

"Of blood! Ah! you think so? Of blood?" cried Althotas, bursting into a laugh.

"Oh, yes, yes; I feel the miasma which is exhaled from a newly killed body. I could weigh it, so heavily does it press upon my brain and heart."

"That is it;" said Althotas, with his sardonic laugh, — "that is it; I also perceived it. You have a tender heart and a weak brain, Acharat."

"Master," said Balsamo, pointing with his finger at the old man, — "Master, you have blood upon your hands; Master, there is blood upon this table; there is blood everywhere, even in your eyes, which shine like two torches; Master, the smell which I breathe, and which makes me giddy, which is suffocating me, is the smell of blood!"

"Well, what then?" said Althotas, quickly; "is this the first time in your life that you have smelt it?"

"No."

"Have you never seen me make experiments? Have you never made any yourself?"

"But human blood!" said Balsamo, pressing his hand upon his burning forehead.

"Ah! you have a subtle sense of smell," said Althotas.

"Well, I did not think human blood could be distinguished from that of any other animal."

"Human blood!" muttered Balsamo. And as he reeled backward and felt for some projecting point to support him, he perceived with horror a vast copper basin, the shining sides of which reflected the purple color of the freshly spilled blood. The enormous vase was half-filled.

Balsamo started back, terrified. "Oh, this blood!" he exclaimed; "whence comes this blood?"

Althotas made no reply, but his watchful eyes lost nothing of Balsamo's suspicion, bewilderment, and terror. Suddenly the latter uttered a terrible roar. Then, stooping like some wild beast darting upon its prey, he rushed to a corner of the room and picked up from the floor a silken ribbon embroidered with silver, to which was hanging a long tress of black hair.

After that wild, mournful, terrible cry, a deathlike silence reigned for a moment in the old man's apartment. Balsamo slowly raised the ribbon, shuddered as he examined the tresses which a golden pin fastened to the silk at one end, while, cut off sharply at the other, they seemed like a fringe the end of which had been dipped in a wave of blood, the red and sparkling drops of which were still apparent on the edge.

In proportion as Balsamo raised his hand, it trembled still more. As he looked more intently at the ribbon, his cheeks became more livid. "Whence does this come?" murmured he, in a hollow voice, loud enough, however, for another to hear and to reply to his question.

"That?" asked Althotas.

"Yes, that."

"Well! it is a silken ribbon tying some hair."

"But the hair, — in what is it steeped?"

"You can see, — in blood."

"In what blood?"

"*Parbleu!* in the blood I wanted for my elixir, — in the blood which you refused me, and which, therefore, I was forced to procure for myself."

"But this hair, these tresses, this ribbon, — from whom did you take them? This is not a child's hair."

"And who told you it was a child I had killed?" asked Althotas, quietly.

"Did you not want the blood of a child for your elixir?" said Balsamo. "Did you not tell me so?"

"Or of a virgin, Acharat, — or of a virgin." And Althotas stretched his long, bony hand from the chair, and took a phial, the contents of which he tasted with delight. Then, in his most natural tone and with his most affectionate smile, "I have to thank you, Acharat," said he; "you were wise and far-sighted in placing that woman beneath my trap, almost within reach of my hand. Humanity has no cause for complaint. The law has nothing to lay hold upon. He, he! — it was not you who gave me the young creature without whom I should have perished. No! I took her. He, he! — thanks, my dear pupil! thanks, my dear Acharat!" And he once more put the phial to his lips.

Balsamo let fall the tress of hair which he held; a horrible light dazzled his eyes. Opposite to him was the old man's table, — a large marble slab always heaped with plants, books, and phials. This table was covered with a long cloth of white damask with dark flowers, on which the lamp of Althotas shed a reddish light, and which displayed an ominous outline which Balsamo had not before remarked. He seized a corner of the cloth and hastily pulled it away. But instantly his hair stood on end; his gaping mouth could not utter the horrible cry which almost suffocated him.

Under this shroud Balsamo had perceived Lorenza's corpse stretched upon the table, her face livid and yet smiling, and her head hanging backward as if dragged down by the weight of her long hair.

A large wound gaped underneath the collar-bone, from which not a single drop of blood escaped. Her hands were rigid, and her eyes closed beneath their purple eyelids.

"Yes, blood! the last three drops of a virgin's blood, — that is what I wanted," said the old man, putting the phial to his lips for the third time.

"Wretch!" thundered Balsamo, whose cry of despair at last burst from each pore, "die, then, for in the last four days she has been my mistress, my love, my wife! You have murdered her in vain! She was not a virgin."

The eyes of Althotas quivered at these words as if an electric shock had made them dance in their orbits; his pupils were fearfully dilated, his toothless gums chattered, the phial fell from his hand upon the floor and broke into a thousand pieces, while he, stupefied, annihilated, stricken at once in heart and brain, fell back heavily upon his chair.

Balsamo bent with a sob over Lorenza's body, and pressing his lips to her blood-stained hair, sank senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DESPAIR.

THE Hours, those mysterious sisters, who cleave the air hand-in-hand with a flight so slow for the wretched, so rapid for the happy, paused in their onward motion, folding their heavy wings over this chamber filled with sighs and groans. Death on one side, agony on the other, and between them despair, — grievous as agony, deep as death.

Balsamo had not uttered a word since the terrible cry which had been wrung from his breast. Since the terrible revelation which had cast down the ferocious joy of Althotas, he had not moved.

As for the hideous old man, thus violently thrown back into life such as God grants to man, he seemed as much bewildered in this new element as the bird struck by a leaden bullet and fallen from the skies into a lake, on whose surface it flutters, unable to employ its wings. The horror expressed in his pale and agonized features revealed the immeasurable extent of his disappointment.

In fact, Althotas no longer even took the trouble to think, since he had seen the goal at which his spirit aimed, and which he had thought firm as a rock, vanish like empty vapor. His deep and silent despair seemed almost like insensibility. To a mind unaccustomed to measure his, it might have seemed an indication of reflection; to Balsamo, who however did not even look upon him, it marked the death-agony of power, of reason, and of life.

Althotas fixed his gaze upon the broken phial, — the image of the nothingness of his hopes. One would have said he counted the thousand scattered fragments, which, in falling, had diminished his life by so many days. One would have said he wished to drink in with his look the precious fluid which was spilled upon the floor, and which for a moment he had believed to be immortality.

At times, also, when the grief of this disenchantment was too poignant, the old man raised his dull eyes to Balsamo, then from Balsamo his glance wandered to Lorenza's corpse. He resembled at these moments those savage animals which the huntsman finds in the morning caught in the trap by the leg, and which he stirs for a long time with his foot without making them turn their heads, but which, when he pricks them with his hunting-knife, or with the bayonet of his fowling-piece, obliquely raise their bloodshot eyes, throwing on him a look of hatred, vengeance, reproach, and surprise.

"Is it possible," said this look, so expressive even in its atony, — "is it credible, that so many misfortunes, so many shocks, should overwhelm me, caused by such an insignificant being as the man I see kneeling there a few yards from me, at the feet of such a vulgar object as that dead woman? Is it not a reversion of Nature, an overturning of science, a cataclysm of reason, that the pupil so gross should have deceived the master so sublime? Is it not monstrous that the grain of sand should have arrested the wheel of the superb chariot, so rapid in its all-powerful, its immortal flight?"

As for Balsamo, stunned, heart-broken, without voice or motion, almost without life, no human thought had yet dawned amid the dark vapors of his brain.

Lorenza, his Lorenza! His wife, his idol, doubly precious to him as his revealing angel and his love, — Lorenza,

his delight and his glory, the present and the future, his strength and faith; Lorenza, all he loved, all he wished for, all he looked forward to in this world, — Lorenza was lost to him forever!

He did not weep, he did not groan, he did not even sigh. He hardly had time as yet for astonishment that so frightful a calamity had fallen upon him. He was like those unfortunates whom an inundation seizes in their bed, in the midst of darkness. They dream that the water gains upon them; they awake, they open their eyes and see a roaring billow breaking over their heads, and have not even time to utter a cry in their passage from life to death.

For a long time Balsamo felt himself buried in the deepest abyss of the tomb. In his overwhelming grief, he looked upon what had happened to him as one of the dark dreams which torment the dead in the eternal silent night of the sepulchre. For him there was no more Althotas, — that is to say, no more hate, no more revenge. For him there was no more Lorenza, — that is to say, no more life, no more love. All was sleep, night, nothingness! Thus the minutes glided past, gloomily, silently, heavily, in this chamber where the blood congealed and the lifeless form grew rigid.

Suddenly, amid the death-like silence, a bell sounded three times. Fritz, doubtless, was aware that his master was with Althotas, for the bell sounded in the room itself. But in vain it sounded three time, with an insolently strange noise; the sound died away in space. Balsamo did not raise his head.

In a few moments the same ringing, only louder this time, sounded again; but, like the first, it could not rouse Balsamo from his torpor. Then, at a measured interval, but not so far from the second as that had been from the

first, the angry bell a third time made the room resound with multiplied echoes of its wailing and impatient sounds.

Balsamo did not start, but slowly raised his head and interrogated the empty space before him with the cold solemnity of a corpse rising from the tomb. So must Lazarus have looked when the voice of Christ called him three times. The bell continued ringing. Its increasing energy aroused at last the intelligence of Lorenza's lover. He withdrew his hand from that of the corpse. All the heat had left his body, without passing into that of Lorenza.

"Some important news or some great danger," muttered Balsamo to himself. "May it prove a great danger!" And he rose to his feet. "But why should I reply to this summons?" he continued aloud, without heeding the gloomy sound of his words echoing beneath the sombre vault of this funereal chamber; "can anything in this world henceforth interest or alarm me?"

Then, as if in reply, the bell struck its iron tongue so rudely against its brazen sides that the clapper broke and fell upon a glass retort, which flew in pieces with a metallic sound, and scattered its fragments upon the floor. Balsamo resisted no longer; besides, it was important that none, not even Fritz, should come to seek him where he was. He walked, therefore, with steady step to the spring, pressed it, and placed himself upon the trap, which descended slowly and deposited him in the chamber of furs. As he passed the sofa, he brushed against the scarf which had fallen from Lorenza's shoulders when the pitiless old man, impassive as death itself, had carried her off in his arms.

This contact, more living seemingly than Lorenza herself, sent an icy shudder through Balsamo's veins. He took the scarf and kissed it, using it to stifle the cries

which burst from his heaving breast. Then he proceeded to open the door of the staircase.

On the topmost steps stood Fritz, all pale and breathless, holding a torch in one hand, and in the other the cord of the bell, which, in his terror and impatience, he continued to pull convulsively. On seeing his master, he uttered a cry of satisfaction, and then a cry of surprise and fear. But Balsamo, ignorant of the cause of this double cry, replied only by a mute interrogation.

Fritz did not speak, but he ventured — he, usually so respectful — to take his master's hand, and led him to the large Venetian mirror that ornamented the mantelpiece at the back of which was the passage into Lorenza's apartment. "Oh, look, your Excellency!" said he, showing him his own image in the glass.

Balsamo shuddered. Then a smile — one of those smiles which spring from infinite and incurable grief, a deathly smile — flitted over his lips. He had understood the cause of Fritz's alarm. Balsamo had grown twenty years older in an hour. There was no more brightness in his eyes, no more color in his cheek; an expression of dulness and stupefaction overspread his features; a bloody foam fringed his lips; a large spot of blood stained the whiteness of his cambric shirt.

Balsamo looked at himself in the glass for a moment without being able to recognize himself, then he determinedly fixed his eyes upon the strange person reflected in the mirror. "Yes, Fritz," said he, "you are right." Then, remarking the anxious look of his faithful servant, "But why did you call me?" he asked.

"Oh! Master, for *them*."

"For them?"

"Yes."

"Whom do you mean by *them?*"

"Excellency," whispered Fritz, putting his mouth close to his master's ear, "the Five Masters."

Balsamo shuddered. "All?" he asked.

"Yes, all."

"And they are here?"

"Here."

"Alone?"

"No; each has an armed servant waiting in the court-yard."

"They came together?"

"Yes, Master, together, and they are impatient; that is why I rang so many times and so violently."

Balsamo, without even concealing the spot of blood beneath the folds of his frill, without attempting to repair the disorder of his dress, began to descend the stairs, after having asked Fritz if his guests had installed themselves in the salon or in the great cabinet.

"In the salon, Excellency," replied Fritz, following his master. Then at the foot of the stairs, venturing to stop Balsamo, he asked: "Has your Excellency no orders to give me?"

"None, Fritz."

"Excellency —" stammered Fritz.

"Well?" asked Balsamo, with infinite gentleness.

"Will your Excellency go unarmed?"

"Unarmed? yes."

"Even without your sword?"

"And why should I take my sword, Fritz?"

"I do not know," said the faithful servant, casting down his eyes, "but I thought — I believed — I feared —"

"It is well, Fritz; you may go."

Fritz moved away a few steps in obedience to the order he had received, but returned.

"Did you not hear?" asked Balsamo.

"Excellency, I merely wished to tell you that your double-barrelled pistols are in the ebony case upon the gilt stand."

"Go, I tell you!" replied Balsamo. And he entered the salon.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE JUDGMENT.

Fritz was quite right; Balsamo's guests had not entered the Rue Saint Claude with a pacific display nor with a benevolent exterior. Five horsemen escorted the travelling carriage in which the Masters had come; five men with a haughty and sombre mien, armed to the teeth, had closed the outer gate and were guarding it while appearing to await their masters' return.

A coachman and two footmen on the carriage seat concealed under their overcoats each a small hanger and a musket. It was rather on an expedition than on a visit that so many persons had come to the Rue Saint Claude. And therefore the nocturnal invasion of these terrible men, whom Fritz had recognized, the forcible taking possession of the hôtel, had inspired the German with an unspeakable terror. He had at first attempted to refuse entrance to the whole party, when he had seen the escort through the wicket, and had suspected them to be armed; but the all-powerful signals they had used — that irresistible testimony of the right of the new-comers — had left him no option.

As soon as they were masters of the place, the strangers, like skilful generals, posted themselves at each outlet of the house, taking no pains to dissemble their hostile intentions. The pretended valets in the courtyard and in the passages, the pretended masters in the salon, seemed to Fritz to bode no good; and that was why he had broken the bell.

Balsamo, without displaying any astonishment, without making any preparation, entered the room, which Fritz, to do proper honor to all visitors, had lighted up as usual. He saw, seated in armchairs, the five visitors, of whom not one rose when he entered. He, as master of the house, having looked at them, bowed politely; then only did they rise and gravely return his salute.

Balsamo took a chair in front of them, without noticing or seeming to notice the strange order of their position. In fact, the five armchairs formed a semicircle like those of the ancient tribunals, with a president, supported by two assistants, and with Balsamo's chair placed in front of that of the president, and occupying the place accorded to the accused in a council or prætorium.

Balsamo did not speak first, as in other circumstances he would have done; he looked around without seeing any object clearly, — still affected by a kind of painful drowsiness, which had remained after the shock.

"It seems, Brother, that you have understood our errand," said the president, or rather he who occupied the centre seat; "yet you delayed to come, and we were already deliberating if we should send to seek you."

"I do not understand your errand," said Balsamo, calmly.

"I should not have imagined so, from seeing you take the position and attitude of an accused before us."

"An accused?" stammered Balsamo, vacantly, shrugging his shoulders. "I do not understand you."

"We will soon make you understand us. Not a difficult task, if I may believe your pale cheeks, your vacant eyes, and trembling voice. One would think you did not hear."

"Oh, yes; I hear," replied Balsamo, shaking his head, as if to banish the thoughts which oppressed it.

"Do you remember, Brother," continued the president,

"that in its last communication the superior committee warned you against a treasonable attempt meditated by one of the great ones of the order?"

"Perhaps so — yes — I do not deny it."

"You reply as a disordered and troubled conscience might be expected to do; but rouse yourself. Be not cast down; reply with that clearness and precision which your terrible position requires. Reply to my questions with the certainty that we are open to conviction, for we have neither prejudice nor hatred in this matter. We are the law; it does not pronounce a verdict until the evidence is heard."

Balsamo made no reply.

"I repeat it, Balsamo, and my warning once given, let it be to you like the warning which combatants give to each other before beginning their struggle. I will attack you with just but powerful weapons; defend yourself!"

The assistants, seeing Balsamo's indifference and imperturbable demeanor, looked at each other with astonishment, and then again turned their eyes upon the president.

"You have heard me, Balsamo, have you not?" repeated the latter.

Balsamo made a sign of the head in the affirmative.

"Like a well-meaning and loyal brother, I have warned you, and given you a hint of the aim of my questionings. You are warned, guard yourself; I am about to begin again."

"After this announcement," continued the president, "the association appointed five of its members to watch in Paris the proceedings of the man who was pointed out to us as a traitor. Now our revelations are not subject to error. We gather them, as you yourself know, either from devoted agents, from the aspect of events, or from infallible indications and signs among the mysterious combinations

which Nature has as yet revealed to us alone. Now one of us had a vision respecting you; we know that he has never been deceived, we were upon our guard, and watched you."

Balsamo listened without giving the least sign of impatience or even of intelligence. The president continued:

"It was not an easy task to watch a man such as you. You enter everywhere; your mission is to have a footing wherever our enemies have a residence or any power whatever. You have at your disposal all your natural resources — which are immense — and those which the association intrusts to you to make its cause triumphant. For a long time we hovered in a sea of doubt when we saw enemies visit you, such as a Richelieu, a Dubarry, a Rohan. Moreover, at the last assembly in the Rue Plastrière, you made a long speech full of clever paradoxes, which led us to imagine that you were playing a part in flattering and associating with this incorrigible race, which it is our duty to exterminate from the face of the earth. For a long time we respected the mystery of your behavior, hoping for a happy result; but at last the illusion was dispelled."

Balsamo retained his motionless, impassive demeanor, insomuch that the president became impatient.

"Three days ago," said he, "five *lettres-de-cachet* were issued. They had been demanded from the king by Monsieur de Sartines; they were filled as soon as signed, and the same day were presented to five of our principal agents, our most faithful and devoted brothers, residing in Paris. All five were arrested: two were taken to the Bastille, where they are kept in the most profound secrecy; two are at Vincennes, in the dungeon; one in the most noisome cell in Bicêtre. Did you know this circumstance?"

"No," said Balsamo.

"That is strange, after what we know of your relations

with those in power in the kingdom; but there is something stranger still."

Balsamo listened.

"To enable Monsieur de Sartines to arrest these five faithful friends, he must have had the only paper which contains the names of the victims in his possession. This paper was sent to you by the supreme council in 1769; and to you it was assigned to receive the new members, and immediately invest them with the rank which the supreme council assigned them."

Balsamo expressed by a gesture that he did not recollect the circumstance.

"I shall assist your memory. The five persons in question were represented by five Arabic characters; and these characters, in the paper you received, corresponded with the names and ciphers of the new brothers."

"Be it so," said Balsamo.

"You acknowledge it?"

"I acknowledge whatever you please."

The president looked at his assistants, as if to order them to take a note of this confession.

"Well," continued he, "on this paper — the only one, remember, which could have compromised the brothers — there was a sixth name. Do you remember it?"

Balsamo made no reply.

"The name was — *the Comte de Fenix.*"

"Agreed," said Balsamo.

"Then why, — if the names of the five brothers figured in five *lettres-de-cachet*, — why was yours respected, caressed, and favorably received at court and in the antechambers of ministers? If our brothers merited prison, you merited it also. What have you to reply?"

"Nothing."

"Ah! I can divine your answer. You may say that

the police had by private means discovered the names of the obscurer brethren, but that they were obliged to respect yours as an ambassador and a powerful man. You may even say that they did not suspect this name."

"I shall say nothing."

"Your pride outlives your honor. These names the police could have discovered only by reading the confidential note which the supreme council had sent you; and this is the way it was seen. You kept it in a coffer. Is that true?"

"It is."

"One day a woman left your house carrying the coffer under her arm. She was seen by our agents, and followed to the hôtel of the lieutenant of police, in the Faubourg St. Germain. We might have arrested the evil at its source; for if we had stopped the woman and taken the coffer from her, everything would have been safe and sure. But we obeyed the rules of our constitution, which command us to respect the secret means by which some members serve the cause, even when these means have the appearance of treason or imprudence."

Balsamo seemed to approve of this assertion, but with a gesture so little marked, that, had it not been for his previous immobility, it would have been unnoticed.

"This woman reached the lieutenant of police," said the president; "she gave him the coffer, and all was discovered. Is this true?"

"Perfectly true."

The president rose.

"Who was this woman?" he exclaimed, — "beautiful, impassioned, devotedly attached to you body and soul, tenderly loved by you; as clever, as subtle, as cunning as one of the angels of darkness who assist man to commit evil! Lorenza Feliciani is your wife, Balsamo!"

Balsamo uttered a groan of despair.

"You are convinced?" said the president.

"Conclude," replied Balsamo.

"I have not yet finished. A quarter of an hour after she had entered the hôtel of the lieutenant of police, you arrived. She had sown the treason; you came to reap the reward. The obedient servant had taken upon herself the perpetration of the crime; you came to add the finishing stroke to the infamous work. Lorenza departed alone. You renounced her, doubtless, and would not compromise yourself by accompanying her; you left triumphantly along with Madame Dubarry, summoned there to receive from your own lips the information you sold her. You entered the carriage with that prostitute, as the boatman entered the boat with the sinner, Mary the Egyptian. You left behind the papers which ruined us with Monsieur de Sartines, but you brought away the coffer which might have ruined you with us. Fortunately we saw you, — God's light is with us when we need it most."

Balsamo bowed without speaking.

"I now conclude," added the president. "Two criminals have been pointed out to the order; a woman, your accomplice, who may be innocent, perhaps, but who, in point of fact, has injured our cause by revealing one of our secrets; and you, the Master, the Great Copt, the enlightened mind, who have had the cowardice to shelter yourself behind this woman, that your treason may be less clearly seen."

Balsamo raised his head, and fixed a look upon the commissioners, burning with all the rage which had smouldered in his breast since the beginning of the interrogation.

"Why do you accuse this woman?" he asked.

"Ah! we know that you will endeavor to defend her;

we know that you love her almost to idolatry, that you prefer her to everything in the world. We know that she is your treasure of science, of happiness, and of fortune; we know that she is more precious to you than all the world beside."

"You know all this?" said Balsamo.

"Yes, we know it; and we shall punish you through her more than through yourself."

"Finish!"

The president rose.

"This is the sentence: Joseph Balsamo is a traitor,—he has broken his oath; but his knowledge is immense, and he is useful to the order. Balsamo must live for the cause he has betrayed. He belongs to his brothers, though he has cast them off."

"Ah, ah!" said Balsamo, gloomily, almost savagely.

"A perpetual prison will protect the association against any renewal of his treachery, at the same time that it will permit the brothers to receive the service from him which it has a right to expect from all its members. As to Lorenza Feliciani, a terrible punishment—"

"Hold!" said Balsamo, with perfect calmness in his voice, "you forget that I did not defend myself; the accused must be heard in his own justification. A word, a single proof, will suffice; wait one moment, and I will bring you the proof I have promised."

The commissioners seemed to deliberate for a moment.

"Ah, you fear lest I should kill myself!" said Balsamo, with a bitter smile. "If that had been my wish, it would have been already done. There is that in this ring which would have killed you all five times over had I opened it. You fear I should escape; let me be guarded if you wish it."

"Go!" said the president.

Balsamo disappeared for a short time. Then he was heard heavily descending the staircase. He entered, bearing the cold, rigid, and discolored body of Lorenza upon his shoulder, her white hand hanging to the ground.

"Here is the woman I adored, who was my treasure, my only happiness, my life! — the woman who, as you say, has betrayed you. Here, take her! God did not wait for you to punish, gentlemen!"

And with a movement quick as lightning he let the corpse glide from his arms, and sent it rolling on the carpet to the feet of the judges, whom her cold hair and the dead and motionless hands touched, to their great horror, while by the light of the lamps they saw the wide gash gaping in her neck, white as a swan's.

"Now pronounce the sentence!" added Balsamo.

The horrified judges uttered a cry, and seized with maddening terror fled in indescribable confusion. Soon their horses were heard neighing and trampling in the courtyard, the outer gate grated on its hinges, and then silence, the solemn silence of the tomb, returned to seat itself beside despair and death.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DOOM.

WHILE the terrible scene, which we have just described, was taking place between Balsamo and the Five Masters, nothing apparently had changed in the rest of the house. The old man had seen Balsamo enter his apartment and bear away Lorenza's corpse; and this new incident had recalled him to what was passing around him. But when he saw Balsamo take up the dead body and descend with it into the lower rooms, he fancied it was the last and eternal adieu of this man whose heart he had broken, and fear descended on his soul with an overwhelming force, which for him who had done all to avoid death doubled the horror of the grave. Not knowing for what purpose Balsamo had left him, nor whither he was going, he began to call out, "Acharat! Acharat!" It was the name his pupil had borne in childhood, and he hoped it would have retained its influence over the man.

But Balsamo continued to descend. Having touched the floor, he even forgot to make the trap reascend, and disappeared in the corridor.

"Ah!" cried Althotas, "see what man is,—a blind, ungrateful animal! Return, Acharat, return! Ah, you prefer the ridiculous object called a woman to the perfection of humanity which I represent! You prefer a fragment of life to immortality!

"But no!" he exclaimed, after a moment's pause, "the wretch has deceived his master! He has betrayed my

confidence like a vile robber; he feared that I should live because I surpass him so much in science; he wanted to inherit the laborious work I had nearly concluded; he laid a trap for me, his master and benefactor! Oh, Acharat!"

And gradually the old man's anger was aroused, his cheeks were dyed with a hectic tinge, his half-closed eyes seemed to glow with the gloomy brightness of those phosphorescent lights which sacrilegious children place in the cavities of a human skull. Then he cried: "Return, Acharat, return! Look to yourself! You know that I have conjurations which evoke fire and raise up supernatural spirits! I have evoked Satan, — him whom the magi called Phegor, in the mountains of Gad, — and Satan was forced to leave his bottomless pit and appear before me! I have conferred with the seven angels who were ministers of God's anger upon the same mountain where Moses received the ten commandments! By my will alone I have kindled the great tripod with its seven flames which Trajan stole from the Jews! Take care, Acharat, take care!"

But there was no reply. Then his brain became more and more clouded. "Do you not see, wretch," said he, in a choking voice, "that death is about to seize me as it would the meanest mortal? Listen, Acharat! you may return; I will do you no harm. Return! I renounce the fire; you need not fear the evil spirit, nor the seven avenging angels. I renounce vengeance, and yet I could strike you with such terror that you would become an idiot and as cold as marble, for I can stop the circulation of the blood. Come back, then, Acharat! I will do you no harm, but on the contrary I can do you much good. Acharat, instead of abandoning me, watch over my life, and you shall have all my treasures and all my secrets. Make me live, Acharat, that I may teach them to you.

See, see!" and with gleaming eyes and trembling fingers he pointed to the numerous objects, papers, and rolls scattered through the vast apartment. Then he waited, collecting all his fast-failing faculties to listen.

"Ah, you come not!" he cried. "You think I shall die thus, and through this murder — for you are murdering me — everything will belong to you. Madman! were you even capable of reading the manuscripts which I alone am able to decipher; were the spirit even to grant you my wisdom for a lifetime of one, two, or three centuries, to make use of the materials I have gathered, — you should not inherit them! No, no, a thousand times no! Return, Acharat, return for a moment, were it only to behold the ruin of this whole house, — were it only to contemplate the beautiful spectacle I am preparing for you! Acharat! Acharat! Acharat!"

There was no answer, for Balsamo was during this time replying to the accusation of the Five Masters by showing them the mutilated body of Lorenza. The cries of the deserted old man grew louder and louder; despair redoubled his strength, and his hoarse yellings, reverberating in the long corridors, spread terror afar, like the roaring of a tiger who has broken his chain or forced the bars of his cage.

"Ah, you do not come!" shrieked Althotas; "you despise me; you calculate upon my weakness! Well, you shall see! Fire! fire! fire!"

He articulated these cries with such vehemence that Balsamo, now freed from his terrified visitors, was roused by them from the depth of his despair. He took Lorenza's corpse in his arms, reascended the staircase, laid the dead body upon the sofa where two hours previously it had reposed in sleep, and mounting upon the trap, he suddenly appeared before Althotas.

"Ah, at last!" cried the old man, with savage joy. "You were afraid; you saw I could revenge myself, and you came! You did well to come, for in another moment I should have set this chamber on fire!"

Balsamo looked at him, shrugged his shoulders slightly, but did not deign to reply.

"I am athirst!" cried Althotas, — "I am athirst! Give me drink, Acharat!"

Balsamo made no reply; he did not move; he looked at the dying man as if he would not lose an atom of his agony.

"Do you hear me?" howled Althotas, — "do you hear me?"

The same silence, the same immobility on the part of the gloomy spectator.

"Do you hear me, Acharat?" vociferated the old man, almost tearing his throat in his efforts to give emphasis to this last burst of rage; "water! give me water!"

Althotas's features were rapidly decomposing. There was no longer fire in his looks, but only an unearthly glare; the blood no longer coursed beneath his sunken and cadaverous cheek; motion and life were almost dead within him. His long sinewy arms, in which he had carried Lorenza like a child, were raised, but inert and powerless as the membranes of a polypus. His fury had worn out the feeble spark which despair had for a moment revived in him.

"Ah!" said he, "ah! you think I do not die quickly enough! You mean to make me die of thirst! You gloat over my treasures and my manuscripts with longing eyes! Ah, you think you have them already! Wait, wait!" And with an expiring effort, Althotas took a small bottle from beneath the cushions of the armchair and uncorked it. At the contact with the air, a liquid

flame burst from the glass vessel, and Althotas, like some potent magician, shook this flame around him.

Instantly the manuscripts piled round the old man's armchair, the books scattered over the room, the rolls of paper disinterred with so much trouble from the pyramid of Cheops and the subterranean depths of Herculaneum, took fire with the rapidity of gunpowder. A sheet of flame overspread the marble slab, and seemed to Balsamo's eyes like one of those flaming circles of hell of which Dante sings.

Althotas no doubt expected that Balsamo would rush into the flames to save this valuable inheritance which the old man was annihilating along with himself, but he was mistaken. Balsamo did not stir, but stood calm and isolated upon the trap-door, where the fire could not reach him.

The flames wrapped Althotas in their embrace, but instead of terrifying him, it seemed as if the old man found himself once more in his proper element, and that, as with the salamanders sculptured on our ancient castles, the fire caressed instead of consuming him.

Balsamo still stood gazing at him. The fire had seized upon the woodwork, and completely surrounded the old man; it roared around the feet of the massive oaken chair on which he was seated, and what was most strange, though it was already consuming the lower part of his body he did not seem to feel it.

On the contrary, at the contact with the seemingly purifying element, the dying man's muscles seemed gradually to distend, and an indescribable serenity overspread his features like a mask. Isolated from his body at this last hour, the old prophet on his car of fire seemed ready to wing his way aloft. The mind, all-powerful in its last moments, forgot its attendant matter, and sure of having

nothing more to expect below, it stretched ardently upward to those higher spheres to which the fire seemed to bear it.

From this moment the eyes of Althotas, which at the first reflection of the flames seemed to have been re-endowed with life, gazed vaguely and abstractedly at some point in space which was neither heaven nor earth; they seemed trying to pierce the horizon. Calm and resigned, analyzing all sensation, listening to all pain, with his last breath on earth the old magician muttered, in a hollow voice, his adieus to power, to life, and hope. "Ah!" said he, "I die without regret. I have possessed everything on earth, and have known all; I have had all power which is granted to a human creature; I had almost reached immortality!"

Balsamo uttered a sardonic laugh, whose gloomy echo arrested the old man's attention. Through the flames which surrounded him as with a veil, he cast a look of savage majesty upon his pupil. "You are right," said he; "one thing I had not foreseen, — God!"

Then, as if this mighty word had uprooted his whole soul, Althotas fell back upon his chair. He had given up to God that last breath which he had hoped to withhold from him.

Balsamo heaved a sigh, and without endeavoring to save anything from the precious pile upon which this second Zoroaster had stretched himself to die, he again descended to Lorenza, and touched the spring of the trap, which readjusted itself in the ceiling, veiling from his sight the immense furnace, which roared like the crater of a volcano.

During the whole night the fire roared above Balsamo's head like a whirlwind, without his making an effort either to extinguish it or to escape. Stretched beside Lorenza's

body, he was insensible to all danger. But contrary to his expectations, when the fire had devoured all, and laid bare the vaulted walls of stone, annihilating all the valuable contents, it extinguished itself; and Balsamo heard its last roarings, which, like those of Althotas, gradually died away in plaints and sighs.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PERPLEXITIES.

THE Duc de Richelieu was in his bed-chamber at his house in Versailles, taking his vanilla chocolate in company with Monsieur Rafté who was going over his accounts. The duke, deeply engaged in looking at his face reflected in a mirror a short distance from him, was giving very little attention to the calculations, more or less exact, of his secretary.

Suddenly a noise of creaking shoes in the antechamber gave notice of a visit, and the duke hastily finished his chocolate, looking uneasily toward the door. There were times when Monsieur de Richelieu, like coquettes of advanced age, did not like to receive visitors.

The valet announced Monsieur de Taverney. The duke doubtless was about to send some excuse, which would have put off until another day, or at least until another hour, his friend's visit, but as soon as the door was opened the petulant old man darted into the room, offered while passing by him the end of his finger to the marshal, and hastened to bury himself in an immense easy-chair which groaned under the shock rather than under his weight.

Richelieu saw his friend go by him like one of those fantastic men in whose existence Hoffman has since persuaded us to believe. He heard the creaking of the chair, he heard a heavy sigh, and turning to his guest, "Eh!

Baron," said he, "what is the news? You seem as sad as death."

"Sad," said Taverney, — "sad!"

"*Pardieu!* that did not seem to me a sigh of joy."

The baron looked at the marshal in a manner which said that while Rafté was present there would be no explanation of the sigh. Rafté understood without taking the trouble to turn around; for he, as well as his master, sometimes looked in mirrors. And he discreetly withdrew. The baron looked after him, and as the door closed behind him, said, "Do not say 'sad,' Duke; say 'anxious,' and mortally anxious."

"Bah!"

"Indeed," cried Taverney, clasping his hands, "I advise you to pretend surprise. For more than a month you have put me off with vague words, such as, 'I have not seen the king,' or again, 'The king has not seen me,' or perhaps, 'The king treats me coolly.' *Cordieu!* Duke, that is not the way to answer an old friend. A month, — why, that is eternity!"

Richelieu shrugged his shoulders. "What the devil do you want me to say, Baron?" he replied.

"Eh! the truth!"

"*Mordieu!* I have told you the truth; *mordieu!* I drum it into your ears, but you will not believe it, that is all."

"What! you would like me to believe that you, duke and peer, a marshal of France, a gentleman of the bedchamber, do not see the king, — you who go to the levée every morning? Nonsense!"

"I have said so, and I repeat it, although it may not be credible; for three weeks I have been present every day at the levée, — I, duke and peer, marshal of France, gentleman of the bed-chamber!"

"And the king does not speak to you, and you do not speak to the king? And you expect me to swallow such a fib as that?" said Taverney.

"Eh! Baron, my friend, you are getting impertinent; you give me the lie as if we were at least forty years younger and still skilful with the small-sword."

"But I am enraged, Duke."

"Ah, that is another thing; be enraged my dear friend, — I am enraged myself."

"You are enraged?"

"And with reason, as you must admit when I tell you that since that day the king has not looked at me; when I tell you that his Majesty has constantly turned his back on me; that whenever I have smiled pleasantly upon him, the king has responded with a frightful grimace. In short, I am weary of going to Versailles to be mocked at! Come! What would you have me do about it?"

Taverney was fiercely biting his finger-nails during this reply of the marshal. "I do not understand it at all," said he, at last.

"Nor I, Baron."

"Indeed, I suppose the king laughs at these anxieties; for in short — "

"Yes; that is just what I say, Baron, in short — "

"Come, Duke, we must find some way out of this perplexity; we must contrive some skilful plan by which we can reach an explanation of all this."

"Baron, Baron," replied Richelieu; "there is danger in provoking explanations from kings."

"You think so?"

"Yes. Do you want me to tell you something?"

"Speak."

"Well, I suspect something."

"And what?" asked the baron, haughtily.

"Ah! now you are getting angry."

"With reason, it seems to me."

"Then, let us stop talking."

"On the contrary, let us go on; but explain yourself."

"The devil is in you with your explanations. Indeed, it is a monomania; beware of it."

"You are charming, Duke; you see all our plans obstructed, you see an unaccountable delay in the progress of my affairs, and you advise me to wait!"

"What delay? Tell me."

"In the first place, see this."

"A letter?"

"Yes, from my son."

"Ah! The colonel."

"Fine colonel!"

"Good! and what is there new down there?"

"That for nearly a month Philippe has been awaiting at Rheims the appointment promised him by the king; that he has not received this appointment; and that the regiment sets out in two days."

"The devil! The regiment sets out?"

"Yes, for Strasburg."

"So that if Philippe does not receive this commission within two days —"

"Well, in two days Philippe will be here."

"Yes, I understand, — they have forgotten the poor boy; it is often so in the bureaus organized like those of the new minister. Ah! if I had been minister, the appointment would have been sent!"

"Ahem!" said Taverney.

"What do you say?"

"I say that I do not believe a word of it."

"What!"

"If you had been minister, you would have sent Philippe to the five hundred devils."

"Oh!"

"And his father too."

"Oh, oh!"

"And his sister farther still."

"It is pleasant to talk with you, Taverney; you are full of spirit. But let us say no more about it."

"I ask nothing better for my own part; but it will not do for my son, — his position is intolerable. Duke, it is absolutely necessary to see the king."

"Eh! that is all I do, I tell you."

"To speak to him, then."

"Eh! my dear friend, you cannot speak to the king if he will not speak to you."

"Force him."

"Ah! I am not the pope."

"Then," said Taverney, "I am determined to speak to my daughter; for there is something equivocal in all this, Monsieur le Duc."

This word had a magical effect. Richelieu had studied Taverney; he knew him for a roué like Monsieur Lafare or Monsieur de Nocé, friends of his youth, whose reputation was unblemished. He feared the alliance of father and daughter; he feared something, he knew not what, which might disgrace him. "Well, do not be angry," said he; "I will try one more plan. But I must have a pretext."

"You have a pretext."

"What is it?"

"The king has made a promise."

"To whom?"

"To my son. And this promise —"

"Well?"

"He must be reminded of it."

"Indeed, that is an expedient. Have you that letter?"

"Yes."

"Let me have it."

Taverney drew it from his vest pocket and handed it to the duke, urging him to the exercise both of caution and of boldness.

"Fire and water," said Richelieu. "Come, we are talking extravagantly. No matter, the wine is drawn, we must drink."

He rang the bell.

"Bring my clothes and see that the carriage is ready," said the duke. Then turning to Taverney, he said with an uneasy manner, "Will you assist at my toilet, Baron?"

Taverney knew that he would trouble his friend by accepting, and replied, "No, my friend, it is impossible; I must take a turn about the city. Where will you meet me?"

"Why, at the château. It is important that you too should see his Majesty."

"You think so?" said Taverney, delighted.

"I insist upon it; I wish you to see for yourself that what I said is true."

"I do not doubt it; but since you wish—"

"You are very glad to, eh?"

"To be frank, yes."

"Well, in the Glass Gallery at eleven o'clock, while I go in to see his Majesty."

"I will be there; adieu."

"Without ill-will, dear Baron," said Richelieu, who even up to the last moment sought to avoid making an enemy of a man the extent of whose power he did not

Taverney got into his carriage and went off, solitary and thoughtful, to take a long drive in the gardens, while Richelieu, left to the care of his valet, made himself young again at his ease, which important business occupied the illustrious hero of Mahon not less than two hours. It was, however, much less time than Taverney in his own mind had allowed him for it; and the baron, on the lookout, saw, at eleven o'clock precisely, the marshal's carriage stop before the entrance of the palace, where the officers in waiting saluted Richelieu, and the ushers conducted him forward.

Taverney's heart beat violently. More slowly than his eager spirit would have urged he repaired to the Gallery of Mirrors, where numerous courtiers, officers bearing petitions, and ambitious lordlings, stood like statues on the slippery floor, — appropriate support for the courtiers of Fortune.

Taverney mingled with the crowd, taking the precaution to place himself in a corner within reach of the marshal when the latter should leave the presence of his Majesty.

"Oh!" muttered he, between his teeth, "that I should be excluded with these country squires and dirty soldiers, — I, who a month ago took supper in private with his Majesty!" And his frowning brow gave expression to more than one infamous suspicion which would have made poor Andrée blush.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MEMORY OF KINGS.

RICHELIEU, in fulfilment of his promise, went bravely and placed himself in view of his Majesty just when Monsieur de Condé was handing him his shirt.

The king, on seeing the marshal, turned away with so sudden a movement that the shirt fell to the floor, and the prince drew back in surprise.

"Pardon, my cousin," said Louis XV., to show the prince that there was nothing personal to him in this quick movement. Richelieu was thus apprised that this expression of anger was directed against him. But as if he had come determined to provoke this anger, if it should be necessary, with a view to a serious explanation, he faced about, as at Fontenoy, and placed himself where the king would pass him in going into his cabinet.

The king, no longer seeing the marshal, began to speak freely and graciously; he finished dressing, arranged for a hunt at Marly, and held a long consultation with his cousin about it, — for Messieurs de Condé have always had the reputation of being great sportsmen. But when he was passing into his cabinet after everybody else had gone away, he perceived Richelieu posing with all his grace for the most charming reverence which had been made since that of Lauzun, who, it will be remembered, bowed so finely.

Louis XV. stopped, almost abashed. "Still here, Monsieur de Richelieu?" said he.

"At your Majesty's service; yes, Sire."

"You have not, then, left Versailles?"

"For forty years, Sire, I have seldom gone away, except when in your Majesty's service."

The king stopped in front of the marshal and said, "You want something of me, do you not?"

"I, Sire?" said Richelieu, smiling. "Eh, what should I want?"

"But you pursue me, Duke, *morbleu!* I perceive it clearly enough."

"Yes, Sire, with my love and my respect. Thanks, Sire."

"Oh! you pretend not to understand me; but you understand me wonderfully well. And I, believe me, Monsieur le Maréchal, have nothing to say to you."

"Nothing, Sire?"

"Absolutely nothing."

Richelieu armed himself with a profound indifference. "Sire," said he, "I have always had the pleasure of believing, in my soul and conscience, that my diligence in the service of the king was disinterested. A great thing to say, Sire, of these forty years of which I have spoken to your Majesty; also, the envious will not say that the king has ever granted me a favor. On that point, fortunately, my reputation is secure."

"Eh, Duke, if you want anything, ask, — but ask quickly."

"Sire, I want absolutely nothing; and for the present I confine myself to begging your Majesty —"

"What?"

"That you will admit to your presence to express his gratitude —"

"Who is it?"

"Sire, one who is under great obligation to the king."

"What do you mean?"

"One, Sire, on whom your Majesty has bestowed a signal honor. Ah! when one has had the honor of sitting at your Majesty's table, when one has enjoyed that graceful conversation, that charming humor which makes your Majesty the most admirable companion, — then, Sire, one never forgets, and he eagerly seeks to continue a custom so delightful."

"Your language is very extravagant, Monsieur de Richelieu."

"Oh, Sire —"

"In short, of whom do you speak?"

"Of my friend Taverney."

"Of your friend?" cried the king.

"Pardon, Sire!"

"Taverney!" replied the king, with an accent of terror which to the duke was very surprising.

"What could you expect, Sire? An old comrade —" he stopped a moment — "a man who served under Villars with me —" He stopped again. "You know, Sire, that in this world we call friends all whom we know; those whom we do not know are our enemies. It is a polite word, which often does not mean anything."

"It is a compromising word, Duke," replied the king, sharply; "it is a word to be used with reserve."

"The utterances of your Majesty are precepts of wisdom. Monsieur de Taverney, then —"

"Monsieur de Taverney is an immoral man."

"Indeed, Sire, on the word of a gentleman, I had mistrusted it myself."

"A man without delicacy, Monsieur le Maréchal."

"As for his delicacy, I will not speak of it before your Majesty. I vouch only for what I know."

"What! you do not vouch for the delicacy of your

friend, of an old comrade, of a man who has served with you under Villars, of a man whom you have presented to me, — in short — You know *him*, however!"

"Him, certainly, Sire; but not his delicacy. Sully told your ancestor, Henri IV., that he had seen his fever go off dressed in a green robe; but I humbly confess, Sire, that I have never known how the delicacy of Taverney was dressed."

"Indeed, Marshal, — it is I who say it, — he is a bad man, who has played a villanous rôle."

"Oh! if your Majesty says so —"

"Yes, Monsieur, I say it."

"Your Majesty relieves my mind by speaking in this way. No, I confess Taverney is not a flower of delicacy; and I have perceived it already. But, Sire, while your Majesty did not deign to tell me your opinion —"

"This is it, Monsieur, I detest him."

"Ah! the judgment is pronounced, Sire. Happily for this unfortunate," continued Richelieu, "a powerful intercessor pleads for him with your Majesty."

"What do you mean?"

"If the father has had the misfortune to displease the king —"

"And very much."

"I do not deny it, Sire."

"What do you say, then?"

"I say that an angel with blue eyes and blond hair —"

"I do not understand you, Duke."

"That may be, Sire."

"I wish to understand you, however, I confess."

"An ordinary person like me, Sire, trembles at the idea of lifting even a corner of the veil which shelters so many charming mysteries of love; but I repeat it, how much

indulgence Taverney must owe to the one who mitigates in his favor the royal indignation. Oh, yes; Mademoiselle Andrée must be an angel!"

"Mademoiselle is a little monster physically, as her father is a monster morally!" cried the king.

"Oh!" cried Richelieu, astounded; "are we all mistaken, and this beautiful appearance —"

"Never speak to me of that girl, Duke; it makes me shudder only to think of her."

Richelieu clasped his hands affectedly. "Oh, my God!" said he, "appearances have turned out — Had not your Majesty, the best judge in the kingdom, infallibility itself, assured me of that, how could I believe it? What, Sire, so deformed?"

"More than that, Monsieur; affected with a malady, — a dreadful, lurking malady, Duke. But, for God's sake, not a word more about her, or you will kill me!"

"Oh, Heaven!" cried Richelieu, "I will not open my mouth again on the subject, Sire. To kill your Majesty! — oh, what a sorrow! What a family it is! He must be unhappy, the poor boy!"

"Of whom do you speak to me now?"

"Oh, this time of a faithful, sincere, devoted servant of your Majesty. Oh, Sire, he is a model, and you have judged him correctly. This time, I vouch for it, your favor has been bestowed upon the right person."

"But whom are you talking about, Duke? Finish what you have to say, for I am in a hurry."

"I speak," replied Richelieu, gently, "of the son of the one, and the brother of the other. I speak of Philippe de Taverney, that gallant young man to whom your Majesty has given a regiment."

"I! I have given a regiment to some one?"

"Yes, Sire; a regiment which Philippe de Taverney

is still waiting for, it is true, but which you have really given him."

"I?"

"Bless me, I believe so, Sire!"

"You are mad!"

"Oh!"

"I have given nothing at all, Marshal."

"Truly?"

"But what the devil is that to you?"

"But, Sire —"

"Does this affair concern you?"

"Not the least in the world."

"You have perhaps sworn to burn me by a slow fire with this fagot of thorns?"

"What do you mean, Sire? I thought — I see now that I was mistaken — I thought that you had promised —"

"But it is not my business, Duke; I have a minister of war. I never give regiments. A regiment! — a pretty story they have told you! Ah! you are the advocate of this brood? I told you that you did wrong to speak to me; see how you have set all my blood flowing the wrong way."

"Oh, Sire!"

"Yes, the wrong way. Though the Devil be the advocate, I will not submit to this any longer;" and with these words the king turned his back upon the duke, and quite furious, took refuge in his cabinet, leaving Richelieu in the deepest misery.

"Ah! now," muttered the old marshal, "I know where I stand."

And dusting off with his handkerchief the powder which in the heat of the encounter had fallen upon his clothes, Richelieu directed his steps toward the gallery in

the corner of which his friend was waiting with burning impatience.

No sooner did the marshal appear than, like a spider pouncing on his prey, the baron ran to get the latest intelligence. With eager eye, his heart in his mouth, his arms extended, he presented himself. "Well! what news?" he asked.

"There is something new, Monsieur," replied Richelieu, straightening himself up, with a scornful curl of the lips and a gesture of contempt; "it is that I beg you never to address me another word."

Taverney looked at the duke with wondering eyes.

"Yes; you have greatly displeased the king," continued Richelieu, "and in displeasing the king, you offend me."

Taverney in his stupefaction stood riveted to the marble floor as if his feet had taken root there.

Richelieu meantime continued on his way. Then arriving at the Gallery of Mirrors, where his valet was in waiting, "To Luciennes!" cried he. And he disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ANDRÉE'S SWOONS.

TAVERNEY, when he had come to himself and examined thoroughly this misfortune, as he called it, knew that the moment had come for a serious explanation with the first cause of these great alarms. Consequently, boiling with anger, he directed his steps to the residence of Andrée.

The young girl was giving the last touch to her toilet, raising her rounded arms to fasten behind her ear two rebellious tresses of hair. She heard the step of her father in the antechamber just as, with book under her arm, she was leaving her apartment.

"Ah! good-day, Andrée," said Monsieur de Taverney, "are you going out?"

"Yes, father."

"Alone?"

"As you see."

"Are you, then, still alone?"

"Since the disappearance of Nicole, I have not procured a maid."

"But you cannot dress yourself, Andrée, that will be injurious to you; a woman carelessly dressed has no success at court. I should recommend to you quite another course, Andrée."

"Excuse me, father, but Madame la Dauphine is waiting for me."

"I assure you, Andrée," replied Taverney, getting excited as he went on, "I assure you, Mademoiselle, that with this simplicity you will be ridiculous."

"Father—"

"Ridicule kills everywhere, and especially at court."

"Monsieur, I will think of it. But just now Madame la Dauphine will be pleased to have me dressed less elegantly that I may be more prompt in responding to her summons."

"Go, then, and return, I beg, as soon as you are free; for I wish to talk with you of a serious matter."

"Yes, father," said Andrée, and she tried to go on her way.

The baron gave her a searching look. "Stop, stop," he cried, "you cannot go out so; you have forgotten your rouge, Mademoiselle, you are so pale as to be repulsive."

"I, father?" said Andrée, stopping.

"Why, when you look at yourself in the mirror what do you think? Your cheeks are as white as wax, and you have circles under your eyes. You will frighten people if you go out in that condition, Mademoiselle."

"I have not time to make any change in my toilet, father."

"It is provoking; indeed, it is disgusting!" cried Taverney, shrugging his shoulders; "there is only one such woman in the world, and I have her for a daughter. What a cruel fate! Andrée! Andrée!"

But Andrée was already at the bottom of the stairs. She came back.

"At least," cried Taverney, "say that you are sick; make yourself interesting, *mordieu!* if you cannot make yourself beautiful!"

"That will be very easy to do, father, and I can truthfully say that I am sick; for I am really suffering at this moment."

"Well," grumbled the baron; "we needed only that, —sick!" Then between his teeth, "Plague take the haughty prudes!" And he returned to his daughter's chamber where he occupied himself in looking carefully for anything which might aid his conjectures and help him form an opinion.

Meantime Andrée crossed the square and walked along by the flower-beds. From time to time she raised her head to breathe more deeply; for the perfume of the newly opened flowers went to her head and made her dizzy. Thus disturbed, almost staggering under the heat of the sun, the young girl arrived, struggling with an unfamiliar sickness, at the antechambers of Trianon, when Madame de Noailles, standing upon the threshold of the cabinet of the dauphiness, gave Andrée to understand with the first words she spoke that it was time for her to arrive and that they were expecting her.

The abbé, reader by appointment to the princess, was taking breakfast with her Royal Highness, who often admitted to such privileges those persons with whom she was intimate. The abbé was praising the excellence of those French rolls which German housekeepers pile up so carefully around a cup of coffee and cream. The abbé was talking instead of reading, and was relating to the dauphiness all the news from Vienna which he had received at the houses of the journalists and diplomatists; for at this period politics were openly discussed, —as freely indeed as in the most secret recesses of government offices; and it was not unusual for the ministry to acquire information which these gentlemen of the Palais-Royal or of the parks of Versailles had divined or perhaps fabricated.

The abbé spoke especially of the recent rumors of a threatened outbreak, occasioned by the high price of grain, which Monsieur de Sartines had quickly sup-

pressed by sending to the Bastille five of the heaviest monopolizers.

Andrée came in. The dauphiness too had her days of caprice and headache; the abbé had interested her; the thought of Andrée's book following his conversation vexed her. Consequently she warned her second reader not to be late again, adding that punctuality, good in itself, was especially so when the occasion called for it.

Andrée, confounded by the reproach and wounded by its injustice, made no reply, although she might have said that she had been detained by her father and forced to come slowly because she was suffering so much. No; troubled and oppressed, she bent her head, and as if she were going to die, closed her eyes and lost her balance. But for the support of Madame de Noailles she would have fallen.

"How awkward your bearing is, Mademoiselle!" muttered Madame Etiquette.

Andrée did not answer.

"But, Duchess, she is sick!" cried the dauphiness, rising to go to Andrée.

"No, no," said Andrée, quickly, her eyes full of tears; "no, your Highness, I am well; or rather I am better."

"But see, she is as white as her handkerchief, Duchess. It is my fault, I scolded her. Poor child, sit down, I wish it."

"Madame—"

"Come, when I command! Give her your folding chair, Abbé."

Andrée sat down, and gradually, under the gentle influence of this kindness, her mind became composed and the color returned to her cheeks.

"Well, Mademoiselle, can you read now?" asked the dauphiness.

"Oh, yes, indeed; I hope so, at least."

And Andrée opened the book at the place where she had left off reading the evening before, and with a voice which she tried to steady, to make her reading as intelligible and agreeable as possible, she began. But she had read hardly two or three pages when the little black letters dancing before her eyes began to go round and round, and finally became illegible.

Andrée grew pale again; cold perspiration rose from her breast to her forehead, and that black circle around the eyes, with which Taverney had reproached his daughter so bitterly, increased to such a degree that the dauphiness, who had looked up when Andrée stopped reading, cried out, "See, Duchess, indeed this child is very sick; she is fainting."

And the dauphiness herself ran to get a bottle of salts which she made her reader inhale. Thus revived, Andrée tried to pick up the book, but the effort was in vain; her hands kept up a nervous trembling which for some time nothing could quiet.

"Most assuredly, Duchess," said the dauphiness, "Andrée is suffering, and she must not aggravate her trouble by staying here."

"Then Mademoiselle must return directly home," said the duchess.

"And why so, Madame?" asked the dauphiness.

"Because," replied the lady of honor, with a low bow, "because the small-pox begins in this way."

"The small-pox?"

"Yes, fainting-fits, swoons, chills."

The abbé thought himself materially concerned in the danger indicated by Madame de Noailles, for he got up, and thanks to the liberty which this indisposition of a woman gave him, he slipped away on tip-toe so quietly that no one noticed his departure.

When Andrée saw herself, so to speak, in the arms of the dauphiness, the shame of having annoyed to this degree so great a princess renewed her strength, or rather her courage. She went to the window to breathe more freely.

"There is no need of going to the window for fresh air, my dear child," said Madame la Dauphine; "pray, return home, I will go with you."

"Oh, I assure you, Madame," said Andrée, "that I am quite recovered; I can go alone very well if your Highness will give me permission to retire."

"Yes, yes; and be calm," replied the dauphiness; "you shall not be scolded any more since you are so sensitive, little rogue."

Andrée, touched by this kindness, which seemed like a sister's friendship, kissed the hand of her protectress and left the apartment, while the dauphiness looked after her anxiously. When she was at the foot of the steps, the dauphiness called to her from the window, "Do not go in immediately, Mademoiselle. Walk a little while in the garden; this sunshine will do you good."

"Oh, *mon Dieu*, Madame! Thanks!" murmured Andrée.

"And please ask the abbé to return; he is taking his botanical course down there in that bed of Holland tulips."

Andrée was obliged to make a detour in order to meet the abbé. She crossed the flower-garden, and went on with bowed head, a little dull still from the effect of the strange dizziness she had suffered with all the morning; she paid no attention to the birds which, startled, flew over the hedges and flower-beds, nor to the bees humming over the thyme and lilacs. She did not even notice, twenty feet from her, two men who were talking together,

one of whom followed her with a troubled and anxious gaze.

These two men were Gilbert and Monsieur de Jussieu. The former, leaning upon his spade, was listening to the learned professor, who was explaining the manner of watering delicate plants so that the water would pass into the ground and not remain on the surface. Gilbert seemed to be listening eagerly, and Monsieur de Jussieu saw nothing but what was natural in this ardor for science; for the demonstration was one which drew applause from the benches of students in the public course. Now, for a poor young gardener, was it not an unusual good fortune to receive this lesson of so great a master, given in the very presence of Nature?

"There are here, you see, my child, four kinds of earth," said Monsieur de Jussieu; "and if I chose, I could discover ten others mixed with these four primary ones. But for the inexperienced gardener, the distinction would be a little too fine. The florist must always taste the earth, as the gardener his fruits. You understand me, Gilbert?"

"Yes, Monsieur," answered Gilbert, his eyes staring, his mouth open; for he had seen Andrée, and from the place where he stood he could watch her without letting the professor suspect that he was not religiously listening to and comprehending the demonstration.

"In order to get the taste of the earth," said Monsieur de Jussieu, all the time deceived by the absent-mindedness of Gilbert, "shut up a handful in a sieve, pour some drops of water gently over it, and taste this water when it shall have filtered through the earth into a vessel underneath the sieve. The saline savors, whether acrid or insipid or flavored with certain natural essences, suit wonderfully the juices of the plants which you wish to place in it;

for in Nature, says Monsieur Rousseau, your old patron, all is analogy, assimilation, a tendency to homogeneity."

"Oh, my God!" cried Gilbert, extending his arms before him.

"What is the matter?"

"She has fainted, Monsieur, she has fainted!"

"Who, then? Are you mad?"

"She, she!"

"She?"

"Yes," replied Gilbert, eagerly, "a lady;" and his fright and paleness would have betrayed him, as well as the word "she," if Monsieur de Jussieu had not looked up to follow the direction of his hand. In doing this, Monsieur de Jussieu saw, indeed, Andrée, who had dragged herself behind a hedge and fallen prostrate on a bench. There she lay motionless, and at the point of losing consciousness.

It was the hour at which the king made his daily visit to the dauphiness, and crossed the orchard in passing from the great to the little Trianon. He now suddenly appeared. He held a vermilion peach (marvel of precocity), and was asking himself — royal egotist that he was — if it would not tend more to the happiness of France if this peach were enjoyed by him rather than by Madame la Dauphine.

The haste of Monsieur de Jussieu in running to Andrée, whom the king with his feeble sight scarcely saw and did not recognize at all, and the stifled cries of Gilbert which indicated the most profound terror, quickened the step of his Majesty.

"What is the matter? What is it?" demanded Louis XV., approaching the hedge from which only the width of a path separated him.

"The king!" cried Monsieur de Jussieu, supporting the young girl in his arms.

"The king?" murmured Mademoiselle Andrée, fainting away completely.

"But who is it?" repeated Louis XV., — "a woman? What has happened to this woman?"

"Sire, a swoon."

"Ah! let us see," said Louis XV.

"She is unconscious, Sire," added Monsieur de Jussieu, pointing to the young girl lying rigid and motionless upon the bench where he had just placed her.

The king approached, recognized Andrée, and exclaimed, shuddering, "Again! Oh, that is frightful! Those who have such maladies should stay at home. It is not proper to be dying like this all day long in public;" and Louis XV. retraced his steps toward the pavillion of Petit Trianon, muttering a thousand things hostile to poor Andrée.

Monsieur de Jussieu, who was ignorant of the antecedents, stood a moment stupefied; then, turning round and seeing Gilbert ten steps off in an attitude of fear and anxiety, "Come here, Gilbert," cried he. "You are strong; you can carry Mademoiselle de Taverney to her apartments."

"I!" cried Gilbert, trembling; "I carry her, — touch her? No, no; she would never pardon me, — no, never!" and he fled distracted, calling for aid.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DOCTOR LOUIS.

At a short distance from the place where Andrée had fainted two gardeners were working, who ran up on hearing Gilbert's cries, and obedient to the order of Monsieur de Jussieu, bore Andrée to her apartment. Gilbert followed at a distance, with head bowed, and shambling in his gait, like an assassin marching behind the body of his victim.

Monsieur de Jussieu, having reached the principal entrance, relieved the gardeners of their burden. Andrée had just opened her eyes.

The sound of voices and that significant commotion which accompanies every accident, drew Monsieur de Taverney from the apartment; he saw his daughter, tottering still, try to hold herself erect so as to ascend the steps with the help of Monsieur de Jussieu. He ran up, asking like the king, "What is the matter? what is it?"

"Nothing, father," replied Andrée, feebly, — "an ill-turn, a headache."

"Mademoiselle is your daughter?" said Monsieur de Jussieu, saluting the baron.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I cannot leave her in better hands, then; but in the name of Heaven consult a doctor."

"Oh! it is nothing," said Andrée.

And Taverney repeated, "Certainly, it is nothing."

"I hope so," said Monsieur de Jussieu; "but indeed, Mademoiselle was very pale." And then, having assisted

Andrée to the top of the stairs, he took leave. The father and daughter were left alone.

Taverney, who during the absence of Andrée had spent his time profitably in good reflections, took the hand of Andrée, who was still standing, led her to a seat on the sofa, and sat down by her.

"Pardon, Monsieur," said Andrée; "but be so good as to open the window. I need air."

"I wished to talk seriously with you, Andrée, and in this cage they have given you for a dwelling, a breath can be heard on all sides; but no matter, I will speak low." And he opened the window.

Then, reseating himself by the side of his daughter, he said, shaking his head, "It must be confessed that the king who at first displayed so much interest in us does not show much consideration in letting you live in such a den."

"Father," replied Andrée, "there are no accommodations at Trianon; you know that is the great defect of that residence."

"That there should be no accommodations for others," said Taverney, with an insinuating smile, "I can thoroughly understand, my daughter; but as regards yourself, I do not understand it."

"You have too good an opinion of me, Monsieur," replied Andrée, smiling; "and unfortunately everybody does not think as you do."

"All who know you, my daughter, on the contrary, think as I do."

Andrée bowed as she would have done in thanking a stranger; for she began to be uneasy at these compliments from her father.

"And," continued Taverney, in the same insinuating manner, "and — the king knows you, I suppose?" And

while speaking, he cast a look upon the young girl of intolerable inquisitiveness.

"Indeed, the king hardly knows me," replied Andrée, very naturally, "and I am of slight importance to him, as I suppose."

These words made the baron start. "Of slight importance!" he cried; "indeed, I do not understand your words, Mademoiselle. Of slight importance! indeed, you set a low value on your person."

Andrée looked at her father in astonishment.

"Yes, yes," continued the baron; "I say it, and I repeat it, you are so modest as to forget personal dignity."

"Oh, Monsieur, you exaggerate; the king has been interested by the misfortunes of our family, it is true; the king has deigned to do something for us; but there are so many unfortunates about his Majesty's throne, so many gifts fall from the royal hand that he would naturally forget us after the bestowal of his favor."

Taverney looked steadily at his daughter, not without a certain admiration of her reserve and impenetrable discretion. "Come," said he, drawing nearer to her, "come, my dear Andrée; your father shall be the first solicitor who addresses you, and in this character I hope that you will not repulse him."

Andrée in her turn looked at her father like a woman asking an explanation.

"Come," continued he, "we beg you, intercede for us, do something for your family —"

"What do you mean? what do you want me to do?" cried Andrée, stupefied by his tone and the import of his word.

"Are you willing, or not, to ask something for me and for your brother? Speak!"

"Monsieur," replied Andrée, "I will do all that you

tell me to do; but indeed, do you not fear that we shall seem too avaricious? The king has already given me a necklace worth, you say, more than one hundred thousand francs; his Majesty has besides promised a regiment to my brother. We take you see a considerable part of the gifts of the court."

Taverney could not restrain a burst of harsh and scornful laughter. "So," said he, "you think that is sufficient compensation, Mademoiselle?"

"I know, Monsieur, that your services are of great value," replied Andrée.

"Eh!" cried Taverney, impatient; "who the devil is talking of my services?"

"What are you talking about, then?"

"Indeed, you are playing with me a game of foolish dissembling!"

"Why should I dissemble, *mon Dieu?*" asked Andrée.

"But I know all, my daughter!"

"You know?"

"All, I tell you."

"All what, Monsieur?" An instinctive blush, born of this gross attack upon the most modest of consciences, mantled the cheeks of Andrée.

The respect of the father for the child arrested Taverney in the rapid flow of his questions. "Well!" said he, "as you please; you wish to play the coy, it appears, the mysterious! So be it. You leave your father and your brother to the obscurity of oblivion. Very well, but mark my words; when one does not have power from the outset, one is liable never to have it at all." And Taverney turned about on his heel.

"I do not understand you, Monsieur," said Andrée.

"Very well, I understand myself," replied Taverney.

"That is not enough when two are talking together."

"Well, I will be more clear. Make use of all the diplomacy with which you are endowed, and which is a virtue of our family, in making, while there is an opportunity, the fortune of your family and your own; and the first time you see the king tell him that your brother is waiting for his appointment, and that you are growing thin in an apartment without air and light, — in a word, do not be so ridiculous as to have too much love or too much disinterestedness."

"But, Monsieur —"

"Say that to the king, this evening, even."

"But where do you wish me to see the king?"

"And add that it is not even suitable for his Majesty to come —"

Just when Taverney, doubtless, by using more explicit terms, was about to rouse the tempest which was quietly gathering in Andrée's breast, and to provoke the explanation which would have solved the mystery, steps were heard on the stairs.

The baron stopped immediately and ran to the baluster to see who was coming to visit his daughter. Andrée was astonished to see her father step aside against the wall. Almost at the same moment the dauphiness, followed by a man dressed in black and leaning on a cane, entered the little apartment.

"Your Highness!" cried Andrée, mustering all her strength to go to meet the dauphiness.

"Yes, little invalid," replied the princess; "I bring you consolation and the doctor. Come, Doctor. Ah! Monsieur de Taverney," continued the princess, recognizing the baron, "your daughter is ill, and you take no care of this child."

"Madame —" stammered Taverney.

"Come, Doctor," said the dauphiness, with that charm-

ing kindliness which belonged only to her, — "come, feel this pulse, question these heavy eyes, and tell me what is the matter with my protegée."

"Oh, Madame, Madame, what goodness!" murmured the young girl, "how shall I have courage to receive your Royal Highness?"

"In this poor place, you mean, dear child; so much the worse for me who have given you so wretched an apartment. I will attend to that. Come, my child, give your hand to Monsieur Louis, my physician, and take care; he is a philosopher who divines, as well as a scholar who sees clearly."

Andrée, smiling, held out her hand to the doctor. The latter, a young man still, whose intelligent face expressed all that the dauphiness had said of him, had occupied himself since coming into the room in observing, first the invalid, then the locality, afterward the strange appearance of the father, which indicated annoyance but no anxiety. The scholar was about to see clearly; the philosopher had perhaps already divined.

Doctor Louis studied for a long time the pulse of the young girl and questioned her as to her symptoms.

"Complete distaste for all food," answered Andrée; "sudden twinges of pain, flushes of heat rushing suddenly to the head, spasms, palpitations, fainting-fits."

The doctor grew more and more sober as Andrée went on speaking. He finally relinquished the young girl's hand and looked away.

"Well, Doctor," said the princess to the physician, "*quid?* as the consulting physicians say. Is the child in danger, and do you condemn her to death?"

The doctor looked at Andrée and watched her a little while longer in silence. "Madame," said he, "this sickness of Mademoiselle is a very natural one."

"And dangerous?"

"No, not usually," replied the doctor, smiling.

"Ah! very well," said the princess, breathing more freely; "do not make her suffer too much."

"Oh, I shall not make her suffer at all, Madame."

"What! you order no prescription?"

"There is absolutely nothing to be done for the sickness of Mademoiselle."

"Really?"

"Nothing, Madame." And the doctor, as if to avoid an explanation, took leave of the princess under the pretext that his patients needed his attention.

"Doctor, Doctor," said the dauphiness, "if what you say is true, I am much more sick than Mademoiselle de Taverney; bring me, then, without fail, when you visit me this evening, the pills you promised me to make me sleep."

"Madame, I will prepare them myself as soon as I reach home." And he went away.

The dauphiness remained with her reader. "Do not be uneasy, my dear Andrée," said she, with a friendly smile; "your sickness need not cause any anxiety, for Doctor Louis goes away without prescribing for you."

"So much the better, Madame," replied Andrée; "for then my service with your Royal Highness need not be interrupted; and I feared that above everything. However, with all due deference to the learned doctor, I am quite ill, Madame, I assure you."

"It cannot, however, be a serious illness, since the doctor makes light of it. Go to sleep then, my child; I will send some one to wait on you, for I see that you are alone. Be so kind as to attend me, Monsieur de Taverney." She gave her hand to Andrée, and went away, having brought consolation to her as she had promised.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MONSIEUR DE RICHELIEU'S WORD-PLAY.

MONSIEUR LE DUC DE RICHELIEU, as we have seen, proceeded to Luciennes with that rapidity of decision and that sure intelligence which characterized the ambassador at Vienna and the conqueror of Mahon.

He arrived joyous and unconstrained, ascended the stairs like a young man, pulled the ears of Zamore as in the pleasant days of their friendship, and forced, so to speak, the door of that famous boudoir of blue satin where poor Lorenza had seen Madame Dubarry preparing for her journey to the Rue Saint Claude.

The countess, lying upon her sofa, was giving Monsieur d'Aiguillon her orders for the morning. Both turned round on hearing the noise, and were astounded at seeing the marshal.

"Ah, Monsieur le Duc!" cried the countess.

"Ah, my uncle!" said Monsieur d'Aiguillon.

"Eh! yes, Madame; eh! yes, nephew."

"What, it is you?"

"It is I, myself, in person."

"Better late than never," said the countess.

"Madame," said the marshal, "when we grow old we become capricious."

"Which means that you have recovered for Luciennes—"

"A great love which I should not have lost except through caprice. It is just that, and you complete my thought admirably."

"So that you return —"

"So that I return, yes;" said Richelieu, seating himself in the best chair, which he had recognized at the first glance.

"Oh, oh!" said the countess, "there is perhaps some other reason, which you do not give; caprice, — that is not enough for a man like you."

"Countess, it would be wrong in you to press me; I am better than my reputation, and if I return, do you see, it is —"

"It is?" asked the countess.

"With all my heart."

Monsieur d'Aiguillon and the countess burst out laughing.

"How fortunate we are in having a little sense with which to comprehend the sense of which you have so much!" said the countess.

"Why?"

"Yes; I assure you that fools would not understand, would wonder at, and would seek everywhere the reason for your return. Indeed, on the word of a Dubarry, you alone, dear Duke, can make entrances and exits; Molé himself is a wooden actor in comparison with you."

"Then you do not believe that it is the heart which brings me back?" cried Richelieu. "Countess, Countess, take care! you will give me a bad opinion of yourself; oh, do not laugh, nephew, or I shall call you Pierre, and shall not build anything upon you."

"Not even a little ministry?" asked the countess, and for the second time she burst out laughing, with a freedom which she did not try to conceal.

"Good! strike, strike!" said Richelieu, with affected anger, "I will not return the blows; alas, I am too old, I

can only defend myself; abuse me, Countess, abuse me! it is now a pleasure without danger."

"On the contrary, take care, Countess," said D'Aiguillon; "if my uncle talks of his weakness, we are lost. No, Monsieur le Duc, we will not strike you; for feeble as you are, or rather pretend to be, you would return the blows with interest. No, the truth is, we are delighted to see you return to us."

"Yes," said the Countess, playfully, "and in honor of your return, we fire off cannon, rockets; and you know, Duke —"

"I know nothing, Madame!" said the marshal, with child-like innocence.

"Well, in fire-works there is always some wig scorched by the sparks, some hat crushed by the rocket-stick."

The Duke touched his wig and looked at his hat.

"That is the explanation," said the Countess; "but you have come back to us, — that is the principal thing; as for me, I am, as Monsieur d'Aiguillon has told you, in high spirits. Do you know why?"

"Countess, Countess, you are going to say something spiteful!"

"Yes; but it will be the last."

"Well, go on."

"I am in good spirits, Marshal, because your return foretells fine weather."

Richelieu bowed.

"Yes," continued the Countess, "you are like those poetic birds which predict a calm. What is the name of those birds, Monsieur D'Aiguillon? — you who write poetry can tell me."

"Halcyons, Madame."

"Precisely. Ah, Marshal, you will not take offence, I hope! I am comparing you to a bird with a pretty name."

"I shall take offence so much the less, Madame," said Richelieu, with a little grimace which expressed satisfaction, — and Richelieu's satisfaction always foreboded some great wickedness, — "I shall take offence so much the less that the comparison is good."

"Do you see?"

"Yes, I bring good news."

"Ah!" said the countess.

"What is it?" asked D'Aiguillon.

"The devil! my dear Duke, you are in great haste," said the countess; "give the marshal time to make it."

"No, the devil take me! I can tell you immediately; it is made already, and even of ancient date."

"Marshal, if you have brought us any old trash —"

"Indeed!" said the marshal; "it is take, or leave, Countess."

"Well, let us take, then."

"It seems, Countess, that the king has fallen into the trap."

"Into the trap?"

"Yes, completely."

"Into what trap?"

"Into the one you have set for him."

"I!" said the countess; "I have set a trap for the king?"

"*Parbleu!* you know it very well."

"No, upon my word, I do not know it."

"Ah, Countess, it is not kind to mystify me so."

"Truly, Marshal, I do not mean to. Explain yourself, I beg you!"

"Yes, uncle, explain yourself," said D'Aiguillon, who thought he saw some evil design beneath the ambiguous smile of the marshal; "Madame is waiting, and is very anxious."

The old duke turned to his nephew. "*Pardieu!*" said he, "it would be strange if Madame la Comtesse had not taken you into her confidence, my dear D'Aiguillon. Ah, in that case, it would show that she is even deeper than I supposed."

"Me, uncle?"

"Him?"

"Doubtless you, — doubtless him. Come, Countess, let us be frank. Have you taken him in partnership in your little conspiracies against his Majesty, — this poor duke, who has played so noble a part in them?"

Madame Dubarry blushed. It was so early in the day that she had neither rouge nor patches on her face, therefore blushing was possible; but blushing was also especially dangerous.

"You look at me, both of you, with your great, handsome, wondering eyes," said Richelieu; "do I need, then, to give you information about your own affairs?"

"Yes, Marshal," said, at the same time, the duke and the countess.

"Well, the king has discovered everything, thanks to his wonderful sagacity; and he has taken fright."

"What has he discovered?" asked the countess; "tell us, for indeed, Marshal, I am dying with impatience."

"But your show of friendship with my fine nephew here — "

D'Aiguillon grew pale, and his glance at the countess seemed to say, "Do you see? I was sure there was something malicious coming."

Women are courageous in such an emergency, — much more so than men. The countess returned immediately to the combat. "Duke," said she, "I am afraid of enigmas when you fill the rôle of sphinx; for sooner or later you are sure to get the better of me. Relieve me of

anxiety, and if it is a jest indeed, let me judge the evil of it."

"Evil, Countess! it is, on the contrary, excellent!" cried Richelieu; "it is not mine, but yours, be it understood."

"I am not at all concerned in it, Marshal," said Madame Dubarry, biting her lips with an impatience which her little rebellious foot betrayed still more.

"Come, come, no pride, Countess!" continued Richelieu. "It is very good; you have feared that the king would become attached to Mademoiselle de Taverney. Oh, do not dispute it! I have had evidence of it."

"Oh, it is true! I do not deny it."

"Well, fearing this, you wished on your part to pique the king as much as possible."

"I do not deny it. Then?"

"We are coming to it, Countess. But to pique his Majesty, who is rather thick-skinned, you needed a very sharp thorn[1] — Ah, ah, ah! upon my word, what a wretched pun escaped me! Do you understand?" and the marshal begun to laugh, or to feign to laugh, boisterously, so that he could better observe, while convulsed with that hilarity, the very anxious faces of his victims.

"What play of words do you find in that, uncle?" asked D'Aiguillon, the first to recover composure, and affecting simplicity.

"You have not understood it?" said the marshal. "Ah, so much the better! it was execrable. Well, I mean that Madame la Comtesse had wished to make the king jealous, and that she had chosen for this purpose a nobleman who is handsome, witty, — in short, a marvel of Nature."

[1] French: *aiguillon.*

"Who says that?" cried the countess, furious, like all those who are powerful and in the wrong.

"Who says that? — why, everybody, Madame."

"Everybody means nobody; you know it very well, Duke."

"On the contrary, Madame, everybody means one hundred thousand people in Versailles alone; it means six hundred thousand in Paris; it means twenty-five millions in France; and you will see that I am not counting the Hague, Hamburg, Rotterdam, London, Berlin, where there are as many newspapers, in proportion, as in Paris."

"And they say in Versailles, in Paris, in France, in the Hague, in Hamburg, in Rotterdam, in London, and in Berlin — ?"

"Well, they say that you are the most intellectual, the most charming woman in Europe; they say that, thanks to that ingenious stratagem of seeming to have secured a lover — "

"A lover! and what foundation has that stupid accusation, I should like to know?"

"Accusation! what do you mean, Countess? Admiration! They know there is nothing at the bottom of it all, but they admire the stratagem. Upon what is this admiration, this enthusiasm founded? Why upon your manner, sparkling with intelligence; upon your skilful tact; upon your having pretended, with wonderful art, to remain alone that night, — you know, the night when I was at your house, when the king was at your house, and when Monsieur d'Aiguillon was at your house; the night when I left first, when the king went out second, and Monsieur d'Aiguillon the third — "

"Well! go on."

"Upon your having pretended to stay alone with D'Aiguillon, as if he were your lover; to send him out quietly

in the morning from Luciennes, also as if he were your lover; and in such a way that two or three fools, two or three gulls, like me for example, might see it and cry it from the house-tops; so that the king would know, would take fright, and not to lose you would quickly leave the little Taverney."

Madame Dubarry and D'Aiguillon could no longer retain their composure. Richelieu troubled them neither by looks nor by gestures; on the contrary, his snuff-box and his frill seemed to absorb all his attention. "In short," continued the marshal, playing with his shirt-frill, "it appears that the king has certainly left that little one."

"Duke," replied Madame Dubarry, "I declare that I do not comprehend one word of all your imaginings; and I am sure of one thing, that if the king should be questioned about it, he would not comprehend it any better."

"Really!" said the duke.

"Yes, really; and you attribute to me, and the world attributes to me more imaginative faculty than I possess. I have never wished to excite the jealousy of his Majesty by the means of which you speak."

"Countess!"

"I swear it."

"Countess, perfect diplomacy,—and there are no better diplomatists than women, — perfect diplomacy never confesses failure; for there is an axiom in politics — I know it, who have been an ambassador — which says, 'Do not communicate to any one the means which has brought you success once, for it may bring you success twice.'"

"But Duke —"

"The means has succeeded, that is all, and the king is on very bad terms with the whole Taverney family."

"But, indeed, Duke," cried Madame Dubarry, "you have a way of supposing things peculiar to yourself."

"Ah, you do not believe that the king is at variance with the Taverney family?" said Richelieu, eluding a quarrel.

"That is not what I mean."

Richelieu tried to take the countess's hand. "You are a bird," said he.

"And you are a serpent."

"Ah, very good! I shall be eager to bring you good news again, if I am to be rewarded in this way."

"Be undeceived, uncle," said D'Aiguillon, quickly, who had understood the full significance of this manœuvre of Richelieu, "no one appreciates you so highly as Madame la Comtesse, and she was saying so to me at the very moment when you were announced."

"The fact is," said the marshal, "that I am very fond of my friends; also I wished to be the first to bring you the assurance of your triumph, Countess. Do you know that Taverney the father wished to sell his daughter to the king?"

"It has been done, I think," said Madame Dubarry.

"Oh, Countess, how crafty that man is! it is he who is the serpent. Imagine it! I was lulled to sleep by stories of friendship, of old comradeship in arms. Any one can lead me by my affections. And then to think that this rural Aristides should come straight to Paris to cut the grass under the feet of Jean Dubarry, one of the brightest of men! It has indeed required all my devotion to your interests, Countess, to give me a little good sense and penetration; upon my honor I was blind —"

"And according to what you say it is all over then?" asked Madame Dubarry.

"Oh, entirely, I assure you; I have handled this worthy purveyor so roughly that there is probably no more fight in him, and we are now masters of the situation."

"But the king?"

"The king?"

"Yes."

"Upon three points I have confessed his Majesty."

"The first?"

"The father."

"The second?"

"The daughter."

"And the third?"

"The son. Now his Majesty has condescended to call the father a — pander; his daughter an impertinent minx; and as for the son, his Majesty has not called him anything for he did not even remember him."

"Very well, we are now rid of the whole brood."

"I think so."

"Is it worth while to send that fellow back to his hole?"

"I think not; they are reduced to extremities."

"And you say that this son, to whom the king had promised a regiment —?"

"Ah, you have a better memory than the king, Countess. It is true that Monsieur Philippe is a very pretty boy, who sends you killing glances. Indeed! he is neither colonel, nor captain, nor brother of the favorite; but at least he has been distinguished by you."

In saying this, the old duke was trying to tear the heart of his nephew with jealousy, but Monsieur d'Aiguillon was not thinking of jealousy; he was trying to account for the actions of the old marshal, and to discover the real motive for his return. After some reflections he hoped that the wind of favor alone had brought Richelieu to Luciennes. He made a sign to Madame Dubarry which the old duke saw in a pier-glass while adjusting his wig, and immediately the countess invited Richelieu to take chocolate with her.

D'Aiguillon took leave with a thousand expressions of endearment for his uncle which were returned by Richelieu. The latter remained alone with the countess before the round table which Zamore had just spread.

The old marshal observed all this manœuvring of the favorite, saying in a low tone, "Were I twenty years younger I should now be looking at the clock, saying, 'In one hour I shall be a minister,' and I should be one. What a foolish thing life is," he continued, all the time speaking to himself; "during the first part one gives the body to the service of the mind; during the second the mind, which alone has survived, becomes the servant of the body; it is absurd."

"Dear Marshal," said the countess, interrupting the private monologue of her guest, "now that we are good friends, and especially since we are by ourselves, tell me why you gave yourself so much trouble to put that little piece of affectation into the king's bed."

"Upon my word, Countess," replied Richelieu, sipping his cup of chocolate, "that is what I asked myself. I know nothing about it."

CHAPTER XL

THE RETURN.

Monsieur de Richelieu knew what course Philippe would take, and he might safely have foretold his return; for that morning, setting out from Versailles to go to Luciennes, he had met him on the high-road going toward Trianon, and had passed near enough to observe on his countenance indications of sadness and anxiety.

Philippe, indeed, forgotten at Rheims, first having passed through every degree of favor, then of indifference and neglect; Philippe, bored at first by expressions of friendship from the officers jealous of his advancement, then by attentions even from his superiors, — Philippe, in proportion as disfavor had tarnished with its breath this brilliant fortune, was disgusted to see friendships changed to coldness, and civility to rudeness; and in this refined soul, sorrow had taken on the characteristic of regret.

Philippe regretted very much his lieutenantship at Strasburg, now that the dauphiness had come to France; he regretted his good friends, his equals, his comrades; he regretted especially the quiet and pure private life of the paternal home, about the fireside of which La Brie was the grand priest. All trouble found consolation in silence and forgetfulness, — that sleep of active minds; then in the solitude of Taverney, which bore witness to the decay of things as well as to the ruin of individuals, there was something philosophical which spoke powerfully to the heart of the young man.

But Philippe above all felt the loss of his sister's companionship, and of her judgment, always so correct, — a judgment born of elevation of mind rather than the result of experience; for it is a remarkable and conspicuous characteristic of noble souls that they soar involuntarily, and by nature even, above the vulgar crowd, and often on account of their very elevation they escape the wounds and snares which all the cleverness of human insects of a lower order cannot always avoid, however accustomed they may be to manœuvre, to craft, to contemplation of low thoughts.

As soon as Philippe had felt ennui, discouragement overtook him, and the young man became so unhappy in his loneliness that he could not believe that Andrée, that half of himself, could be happy at Versailles when he, the half of Andrée, was suffering so cruelly at Rheims.

He wrote then to the baron the letter with which we are acquainted, and in which he announced his approaching return. This letter surprised no one, especially not the baron; what did surprise him, on the contrary, was that Philippe had had patience to wait so long, when he himself was very anxious, and for fifteen days had begged Richelieu, every time he saw him, to hasten the progress of his affairs.

Philippe, not having received the commission within the time which he himself had allowed, took leave of his officers without seeming to notice their disdain and their sarcasms, — disdain, and sarcasms quite hidden under a veil of politeness, which was still at that period a French virtue, and restrained by the natural respect which a brave man always inspires.

Consequently at the hour when he had determined to depart, — the hour up to which he had awaited his commission with more fear than desire for its coming, — he mounted his horse and took the road to Paris.

The three days' journey which he had before him looked very long, and as he proceeded on his way, his father's silence toward him, and especially that of his sister who had promised faithfully to write to him at least twice a week, assumed an ominous significance.

We have said that Philippe arrived about noon at Versailles, just as Monsieur de Richelieu was leaving it. Philippe had travelled a part of the night, having slept only a few hours at Melun; he was so preoccupied that he did not see Monsieur de Richelieu in his carriage, and did not even recognize his livery. He went straight to the railing in the park where he had bade Andrée good-by on the day of his departure, when the young girl without any cause for distress, since the prosperity of the family was at its height, felt mounting to her brain the prophetic sense of an incomprehensible sorrow.

Philippe too on that day had been affected by a superstitious sympathy with Andrée's griefs. But gradually his mind, having recovered command of itself, had shaken off the burden; and by a strange chance it was he, Philippe, who now without reason, after all, returned to the same place, a prey to the same fears, and without finding, alas! even in his thought, consolation for that insuperable sadness, which, having no cause, seemed like a presentiment. When his horse stepped upon the flint stones of the pavement with a clatter of his hoofs, some one, attracted doubtless by this sound, came out from the trimmed hedge-rows. It was Gilbert, holding in his hand a pruning-bill. The gardener recognized his old master. Philippe also recognized Gilbert.

Gilbert had been wandering about in this way for a month; like a soul in trouble, he knew not where to stop. On that day with his usual cleverness in the execution of his designs, he was occupied in choosing points of view in

the alleys where he might see the pavilion or the window of Andrée, and have constant watch upon that house without any one noticing his preoccupation, his tremblings, and his sighs.

With pruning-bill in hand to keep up appearances he ran through copse and parterre, cutting here the branches laden with flowers, under pretext of trimming, stripping there the sound bark from the young lindens, under pretext of getting resin and gum; at the same time ever listening, ever watching, wishing, and regretting.

The young man had become very pale in the month just passed; his face no longer showed signs of youth, except by the strange fire of his eyes and the dead and smooth whiteness of his complexion; but his mouth shrivelled by dissimulation, his furtive glance, the trembling of the muscles of his face, belonged to the more sombre years of ripe age. Gilbert had recognized Philippe, as we have said; and on recognizing him, he turned to go back into the hedge-row. But Philippe rode toward him, crying out, "Gilbert! I say, Gilbert!"

Gilbert's first thought had been to fly; a second more and the vertigo of terror, and that delirium, impossible to explain, which the ancients who sought a cause for everything attributed to the god Pan, would have seized upon him and dragged him like a madman through the paths, through the shrubbery, through the hedge-rows, even into the ponds.

A word full of sweetness spoken by Philippe was fortunately heard and comprehended by the furious fellow.

"You do not recognize me, then, Gilbert?" cried Philippe to him.

Gilbert saw his folly and stopped short. Then he turned back, but slowly and defiantly. "No, Monsieur le Chevalier," said he, trembling, "no, I did not recognize

you; I had taken you for one of the guards, and as I am not at my work I had feared to be seen here, and reported for punishment."

Philippe was satisfied with the explanation, jumped to the ground, put the horse's bridle over his arm, and placing the other hand upon Gilbert's shoulder, who shuddered visibly, asked, "What is the matter with you, Gilbert?"

"Nothing, Monsieur," replied the latter.

Philippe smiled sadly. "You do not like us, Gilbert," said he.

The young man shuddered again.

"Yes, I know," continued Philippe; "my father has treated you unjustly and harshly; but I, Gilbert?"

"Oh, you —" murmured the young man.

"I have always loved you, and upheld you."

"It is true."

"So, forget the evil in the good; my sister has also been good to you."

"Oh, no, — as to that, — no," the young man replied quickly, with an incomprehensible expression; for it included an accusation against Andrée, and an excuse for himself. It flashed out like pride, while it groaned like remorse.

"Yes, yes," said Philippe, in his turn, — "yes, I know my sister is rather haughty, but she is good at heart." Then after a pause, — for all this conversation was only delaying an interview which he looked forward to with gloomy forebodings, — "Do you know where my good Andrée is at this moment, Gilbert?"

This name smote Gilbert's heart painfully; he answered, with choking voice, "At home, Monsieur, I suppose, — how should I know?"

"Alone as usual, with nothing to amuse her; poor sister!" interrupted Philippe.

"Alone at this moment, yes, Monsieur, most probably; for since the flight of Nicole —"

"What! Nicole has fled?"

"Yes, Monsieur, with her lover."

"With her lover?"

"At least, I presume so," said Gilbert, who saw that he had gone too far. "That is the common report."

"But, indeed, Gilbert," said Philippe, more and more uneasy, "I do not understand it at all. I have to drag the words from you. Be a little more agreeable. You have intelligence, and you are not wanting in natural distinction of manner; come, do not spoil these good qualities by an affected unsociableness, by a gruffness which suits neither your station in life nor any other."

"But I do not know all that you ask me, Monsieur; and when you think of it, you will see that I cannot know it. I work all day in the gardens, and how can I know what they are doing at the chateau?"

"Gilbert, Gilbert, I thought that you had eyes."

"I?"

"Yes, and that you would take an interest in all who bear my name; for however poor the hospitality of Taverney may have been, you at least shared it."

"So I do take great interest in you, Monsieur Philippe," said Gilbert, in a voice harsh and rough; for the gentleness of Philippe, and another sentiment which the latter could not divine, had softened this fierce heart. "Yes, I like you, *you*; that is why I will tell you that Mademoiselle, your sister, is very ill."

"Very ill, my sister!" Philippe burst out, — "very ill, my sister, very ill! and you did not tell me so at once!" And immediately abandoning his slow pace for a quicker one, "What is the matter with her, *mon Dieu?*" he asked.

"Indeed," said Gilbert, "nobody knows."

"But what is it?"

"Only that she has fainted three times to-day in the garden, and that, early as it is, the doctor of Madame la Dauphine has already visited her, and Monsieur le Baron also."

Philippe heard no more. His forebodings were realized; and confronted with real danger, all his courage had returned to him. He left his horse in Gilbert's hands, and went hastily toward the offices.

As for Gilbert, left alone, he quickly led the horse to the stable, and fled, like those wild or noxious birds which can never stay within range of man.

CHAPTER XLI.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

PHILIPPE found his sister lying on the little sofa of which we have already had occasion to speak.

On entering the antechamber, the young man noticed that Andrée had carefully put away all the flowers, — she who was so fond of them; for since her sickness the fragrance of the flowers had caused her unbearable pains, and she attributed to this irritation the affection of the cerebral fibres which had lasted now fifteen days.

When Philippe entered, Andrée was dreaming; her beautiful brow was clouded, and her eyes moved painfully in the sockets. Her hands were hanging down, and although in this situation the blood would naturally flow into them, they were as white as those of a wax statue. So motionless was she that she seemed lifeless, and it was necessary to hear her breathe to be sure that she was not dead.

Philippe had walked more rapidly after Gilbert had told him that his sister was sick, so that he was almost breathless when he arrived at the foot of the stairs. But there he had stopped, his reason had returned to him, and he had ascended the stairs with a calmer step; so that at the threshold of the chamber he trod as noiselessly and quietly as if he had been a sylph. He wished to examine for himself the illness by its symptoms, with the solicitude characteristic of those who love; he knew that Andrée was so tender and good, that, as soon as she had

seen him, she would assume such a conduct and demeanor as not to alarm him.

He went in, opening the glass-door so gently that Andrée did not hear him, and was in the middle of the chamber before she suspected anything.

Philippe had therefore time to look at her, to notice how pale, how motionless, how lifeless she was; he perceived the strange expression of her eyes, which were sunk in deep hollows; and more alarmed than he had thought possible, he discovered that the sufferings of his sister were in a great degree of a moral nature. At this sight, which sent a chill to his heart, he could not restrain a movement of fright.

Andrée looked up, and uttering a loud cry she stood up like a dead person come to life, and in her turn panting for breath, ran to throw her arms around her brother's neck.

"You, you, Philippe!" said she; and her strength left her before she could say anything more. Besides, what else could she say, when that was all her thought?

"Yes, yes, I," replied Philippe, embracing and supporting her, for he felt her sinking within his arms, — "I, who come back to find you sick! Ah, poor sister, what is the matter with you?"

Andrée began to laugh in a nervous way, which troubled Philippe instead of reassuring him, as the invalid had wished.

"Do you ask what is the matter with me? Do I look sick, then, Philippe?"

"Oh, yes, Andrée! you are very pale, and you tremble all over."

"But where have you seen that, brother? I am not even indisposed; who has informed you so incorrectly? Who has been so foolish as to frighten you? But indeed

I do not know what you mean; and I am remarkably well, with the exception of some slight attacks of dizziness, which will pass away as they came."

"Oh! but you are so pale, Andrée —"

"Have I, then, usually much color?"

"No; but you are alive at least, while to-day —"

"It is nothing."

"See, see! your hands, which a little while ago were burning, are now as cold as ice."

"It is very simple, Philippe; when I saw you enter —"

"Well?"

"I felt a lively sensation of joy, and the blood went to my heart, that is all."

"But you totter, Andrée; you lean upon me."

"No; I am embracing you, that is all. Do you not wish me to embrace you, Philippe?"

"Oh, dear Andrée!" and he pressed the young girl to his heart.

At that very moment Andrée felt her strength leaving her again; in vain she tried to cling to her brother's neck, her hand slipped, stiff, and almost inanimate, and she fell back on the sofa whiter than the muslin curtains upon which her charming figure was outlined.

"You see, you see that you deceive me!" cried Philippe. "Ah, dear sister, you are suffering, you are ill!"

"The flask!" murmured Andrée, forcing upon her countenance a smile which he would remember to his dying day. And her feeble glance, and hand raised with pain, pointed out to Philippe a flask on the little desk by the window.

Philippe rushed toward it, his eyes fixed on his sister whom he dreaded to leave. Then opening the window he came back and put the flask to her pinched nostrils.

"There, there," said she, inhaling in long draughts air and life, "you see that I am revived. Come, do you think I am very sick? Speak."

But Philippe did not even think of answering, he was looking at his sister. Andrée recovered gradually, sat up on the sofa, took in her moist hands Philippe's trembling hand, and her face taking on a softened expression, the blood mounting to her cheeks, she appeared more beautiful than she had ever been.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!*" said she; "you see, Philippe, it is over, and I am sure that but for the surprise which you gave me with such good intention, the spasms would not have returned, and I should have been well; but coming so suddenly before me, you know, Philippe (before me who love you so much), — you who are the moving power, the substance of my life, — why, that was enough to kill me, even if I had been strong."

"Yes, all that is very pleasant and very charming, Andrée; meanwhile tell me, I beg you, to what you attribute this illness?"

"How do I know, dear? To the return of spring, the season of flowers. You know how nervous I am; yesterday the odor of the Persian lilacs suffocated me. You know what an intoxicating perfume is exhaled from those magnificent plumes which sway in the early breezes of spring; well, yesterday — Oh, *mon Dieu!* Philippe, I do not wish to think of it, for I am afraid the illness will return."

"Yes, you are right, and perhaps it is that; flowers are very harmful sometimes. Do you remember that when a child at Taverney I took it into my head to surround my bed with a border of cut lilacs? It was pretty as an altar we both said; but the next day I did not wake up, you know, and everybody thought me dead except you, who would not believe that I could leave you without saying

good-by; and it was you alone, poor Andrée, — you were six years old at that time, — it was you alone who revived me with kisses and tears."

"And air, Philippe, for it is air that one needs in such a case; I seem never to have air enough."

"Ah, sister, sister! you have forgotten all about that; you have had flowers brought into your chamber!"

"No, Philippe, no indeed; for fifteen days there has not been even an Easter daisy here! What a strange thing! I who loved flowers so much, now hold them in abhorrence. But let us leave the flowers alone. Then I have had headache; Mademoiselle de Taverney has had headache, dear Philippe, and what a fortunate person this Demoiselle de Taverney is! for on account of this headache which brought on a fainting-fit, both the court and the town have become interested in her condition."

"How is that?"

"To be sure, Madame la Dauphine has been kind enough to come to see me, — oh, Philippe what a charming protectress and refined friend Madame la Dauphine is! She has taken care of me, nursed me, brought me her own physician, and when that grave personage, whose decrees are infallible, felt my pulse, looked at my eyes and tongue, — can you think of the latest piece of good fortune which has befallen me?"

"No."

"Well, it was proved unqualifiedly that I was not sick the least in the world; Doctor Louis did not think it necessary to order me a single potion, to prescribe me a single pill, — he who, it is said, every day cuts off arms and legs which it makes one shudder to think of. So, Philippe, you see, I am remarkably well. Now tell me who has frightened you?"

"It is that little fool of a Gilbert, *pardieu!*"

"Gilbert?" said Andrée, with a gesture of impatience.

"Yes, he told me that you were very sick."

"And you believed that little idiot, that fellow good for nothing but to do or speak evil?"

"Andrée, Andrée!"

"Well?"

"You are growing pale again."

"No, but Gilbert irritates me; it is not enough to meet him in my path, but I must hear him spoken of when he is not by."

"Come, you are going to faint again."

"Oh, yes, yes! *mon Dieu!* But it is as—" And Andrée's lips blanched, and her voice stopped.

"How strange this is!" murmured Philippe.

Andrée made an effort. "No, it is nothing," she said; "do not mind all my nervous feelings. See, I am standing up, Philippe; if you agree, we will take a walk together, and in ten minutes I shall be well."

"I think you are mistaken as to the amount of your strength, Andrée."

"No; Philippe's return would bring me health even if I were dying. Shall we go out, Philippe?"

"Presently, dear Andrée," said Philippe, gently detaining his sister. "You have not wholly reassured me; wait until you are better."

"Very well."

Andrée fell back upon the sofa, drawing after her Philippe, whose hand she held. "And why," she continued, "do you come so suddenly without sending word?"

"But answer me, dear Andrée, why did you cease writing to me?"

"It is only a few days since I wrote."

"Almost fifteen days, Andrée."

Andrée bowed her head.

"Negligent!" said Philippe, with gentle reproach.

"No, but suffering, Philippe. Well, you are right; my

illness began on the day when you ceased to hear from me. Since that day things most dear have wearied me and been distasteful to me."

"And in the midst of all this I am much pleased with what you have just said."

"What have I said?"

"You have said that you were happy; so much the better, for if you are loved and respected, it is not so with me."

"With you?"

"Yes, with me, who was entirely neglected yonder, even by my sister."

"Oh, Philippe!"

"Could you believe, my dear Andrée, that since my departure, which they told me was so urgent, I have heard nothing of that pretended regiment which they sent me to take possession of, and which the king had promised me through Monsieur de Richelieu, through my father, even?"

"Oh, that does not surprise me," said Andrée.

"What! that does not surprise you?"

"No. If you knew, Philippe! Monsieur de Richelieu and my father are unsettled in their relations with each other; they seem like two bodies without souls. I do not understand the life of such people. On a certain morning my father runs over to see his old friend, as he calls him; he sends him to Versailles to see the king; then he returns here to wait, where he occupies himself in putting to me questions I do not understand. The day passes; no news. Then Monsieur de Taverney enters in great anger. The duke drives him away, he says; the duke is a traitor. Whom does the duke betray? I ask you; for I know nothing about it, and I confess I have but little desire to understand it. Monsieur de Taverney lives like a lost soul in purgatory, expecting always something which does not happen, — some one who never comes."

"But the king, Andrée, the king?"

"What, the king?"

"Yes, the king; so well disposed toward us."

Andrée looked timidly about her.

"What?"

"Listen! The king — let us speak low — I think I am very whimsical, Philippe. His Majesty at first seemed to be interested in me as well as in you, our father, and the family; but suddenly this interest grew cold without any apparent reason for it. The fact is, that his Majesty no longer looks at me, — he even turns his back on me, — and only yesterday, when I fainted in the garden —"

"Ah, you see, Gilbert was right; you did faint then, Andrée?"

"That miserable little Monsieur Gilbert had great need to tell you that, indeed; to tell everybody, perhaps! What concern is it of his whether I faint or not? I know very well, dear Philippe," added Andrée, smiling, "that it is not the thing to faint in a royal mansion; but in short, one does not faint for the pleasure of it, and I did not do it on purpose."

"But who blames you for it, dear sister?"

"Eh! why, the king."

"The king?"

"Yes, his Majesty was crossing the orchard on his way from Grand Trianon just at the fatal moment. I was stretched quite senseless on a bench, in the arms of good Monsieur de Jussieu, who was helping me the best he could, when the king perceived me. You know, Philippe, fainting does not take away all perception, all consciousness of what is passing around us. Well, when the king saw me, insensible as I seemed, I noticed a knitting of the eyebrows, a look of anger, and I heard some very disagreeable words which the king muttered between his teeth; then his Majesty hurried off, very much scandalized, I

suppose, that I allowed myself to be ill on his grounds. Indeed, dear Philippe, it was, however, not my fault."

"Poor dear," said Philippe, pressing affectionately the hands of the young girl, "I believe, indeed, that it was not your fault; and then?"

"That is all, my dear. And Monsieur Gilbert might have spared his remarks."

"Come, now, you are hard on the poor fellow."

"Oh, yes, assume his defence, — a charming subject!"

"Andrée, for mercy's sake, do not be so unkind toward this boy. You wound him; you treat him harshly. I have seen you doing it — Oh, my God! Andrée, what is the matter now?"

This time Andrée had fallen backward upon the sofa-cushions without uttering a word. This time the flask could not revive her; it was necessary to wait until the swoon was over, — until circulation was restored.

"Decidedly," murmured Philippe, "you are suffering, my sister, in a way to frighten persons more courageous than I am where your sufferings are concerned. You may say what you please, but it seems to me that you ought not to treat this indisposition so lightly as you do."

"But, indeed, Philippe, since the doctor has said —"

"The doctor does not convince, and will never convince me; I wish I could have spoken to him myself! Where is this doctor to be found?"

"He comes every day to Trianon."

"But at what hour every day? In the morning?"

"Morning and evening, when he is in attendance."

"Is he on duty now?"

"Yes, my dear, and at seven in the evening precisely, for he is punctual, he will ascend the flight of stairs which leads to the apartments of Madame la Dauphine."

"Well," said Philippe, more composed, "I will wait here."

CHAPTER XLII.

A MISUNDERSTANDING.

Philippe continued the conversation unaffectedly, meanwhile secretly observing his sister, who tried to gain command over herself so that she might not increase his anxiety by new fainting-fits.

Philippe spoke much of his disappointments, of the neglect of the king, the inconstancy of Monsieur de Richelieu. And when he heard seven o'clock strike he went out hastily, troubling himself but little to conceal from Andrée what he was about to do.

He went straight to the pavilion of the queen, and stopped at a distance sufficient to prevent his being questioned by persons in the service of the house, but so near that no one could pass without being recognized by him. In about five minutes he saw approaching him the stately and almost majestic figure of the doctor, whom Andrée had described to him. The day was declining, and in spite of the difficulty he found in reading, the worthy doctor was conning a treatise recently published at Cologne upon the causes and results of paralysis of the stomach. Darkness was gradually settling about him and the doctor was already guessing rather than reading, when a moving and opaque body shut out the last ray of light from the eyes of the learned practitioner. He looked up, saw a man in front of him, and asked, "What is the matter?"

"Pardon, Monsieur!" said Philippe; "have I the honor of speaking to Monsieur le Docteur Louis?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the doctor, shutting his book.

"Then a word with you, Monsieur, if you please!" said Philippe.

"Monsieur, excuse me! It is the hour for my visit to Madame la Dauphine, and I must not delay."

"Monsieur," and Philippe, with a gesture of entreaty, placed himself in the doctor's way, — "Monsieur, the person for whom I ask your aid is in the service of Madame la Dauphine. She is very ill, while Madame la Dauphine is not ill at all."

"In the first place, of whom are you speaking?" asked the doctor.

"Of a person to whom you have been introduced by Madame la Dauphine herself."

"Ah, ah! it might perhaps be Mademoiselle de Taverney?"

"Precisely, Monsieur."

"Ah, ah!" said the doctor, looking up quickly to observe the young man.

"You know, then, that she is very sick?"

"Yes; spasms, is it not?"

"Continual swoons, — yes, Monsieur. To-day, in the space of a few hours, she has fainted three or four times in my arms."

"Is the young lady worse?"

"Alas! I do not know; but you understand, Doctor, when one loves — "

"Do you love Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney?"

"Oh, more than my life, Doctor!" Philippe pronounced these words with such exaltation of fraternal love, that Doctor Louis mistook their meaning.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "it is you, then — " The doctor hesitated.

"What do you mean, Monsieur?" asked Philippe.

"It is you, then, who are —"

"Who am what, Monsieur?"

"Eh, *parbleu!* who are her lover?" said the doctor, impatiently.

Philippe took two steps backward, putting his hand to his brow, and becoming pale as death. "Monsieur," he said, "take care; you insult my sister!"

"Your sister! is Mademoiselle your sister?"

"Yes, Monsieur; and I did not think I had said anything to give rise, on your part, to such a misunder standing."

"Excuse me, Monsieur! the hour at which you accost me, the air of mystery with which you spoke, — I have thought, I have supposed, that an interest more tender even than that of a brother —"

"Oh, Monsieur! neither lover nor husband will ever love my sister with a more profound love than mine."

"Very well, in that case I understand that my supposition may have wounded you, and I offer you an apology. Will you allow me, Monsieur?" and the doctor made a movement to go on.

"Doctor," insisted Philippe, "I beg of you, do not leave me without having reassured me as to the condition of my sister."

"But what has made you anxious about her condition?"

"Eh, *mon Dieu!* what I have seen."

"You have seen symptoms which indicate an indisposition —"

"Grave, Doctor!"

"That depends upon circumstances."

"Listen, Doctor! there is in all this something strange; it would seem that you will not, that you dare not, answer me."

"Suppose rather, Monsieur, that in my impatience to go to Madame la Dauphine, who is expecting me — "

"Doctor, Doctor!" said Philippe, passing his hand over his streaming brow, "you have taken me for the lover of Mademoiselle de Taverney?"

"Yes; but you have undeceived me."

"You think, then, that Mademoiselle de Taverney has a lover?"

"Pardon, Monsieur! I am not accountable to you for my thoughts."

"Doctor, have pity on me! Doctor, you have let fall a word which sticks in my heart like the broken blade of a poniard. Doctor, do not try to put me off; as you are a gentleman and a skilful doctor, what is that malady which you could explain to a lover, and which you wish to conceal from a brother? Doctor, I entreat you to answer me!"

"I will ask you, on the contrary, to excuse me from answering you, Monsieur; for by the way in which you question me, I see that you are not master of yourself."

"Oh, my God! you do not know, then, Monsieur, how each one of your words drives me toward that abyss, — the thought of which makes me shudder."

"Monsieur!"

"Doctor!" cried Philippe, with added vehemence, "you have as much as said that you have a terrible secret to disclose to me, to hear which I need all my composure and all my courage."

"But I do not know what supposition is misleading you. I have said nothing of the kind."

"Oh, you do a hundred times more than say! You let me think things. Oh, it is not kindness, Doctor; you see how my heart is consuming before you; you see how I beg, how I entreat. Speak, speak! See, I swear to

you, I am composed, I have courage — This sickness, this dishonor perhaps — Oh, my God! you do not contradict me, Doctor, Doctor!"

"Monsieur de Taverney, I have said nothing, neither to Madame la Dauphine, nor to your father, nor to you. Do not ask me anything more."

"Yes, yes; but you see how I interpret your silence. You see how I follow your thought into the dark and fatal road into which it plunges; stop me, at least, if I wander."

"Adieu, Monsieur," replied the doctor, sharply.

"Oh, you will not leave me without saying yes or no? One word, only one, — it is all I ask."

The doctor stopped. "Monsieur," he said, "just now — and that brings us back to the fatal mistake which has wounded you — "

"Do not let us speak of that, Monsieur."

"On the contrary, we will speak of it. Just now — a little late, perhaps — you told me that Mademoiselle de Taverney was your sister; but previously, with an exaltation which caused my error, you had told me that you loved Mademoiselle Andrée more than your life."

"It is true."

"If your love for her is so great, she must love you in return?"

"Oh, Monsieur! Andrée loves me better than she loves any one else."

"Well, then, return to her, question her, Monsieur, — question her on that mystery in which I am obliged to leave you; and if she loves you as you love her, why she will answer your questions. There are many things one will say to a friend which one will not say to a physician; then, perhaps, she will consent to tell you that of which I would not give you even a hint to save a finger of my

right hand. Adieu, Monsieur;" and the doctor turned again toward the pavilion.

"Oh, no, no, it is impossible!" cried Philippe, mad with grief, and sobbing at every word; "no, Doctor, I have misunderstood, — you cannot have said that!"

The doctor quietly moved away. Then, with a gentleness full of commiseration, "Do as I have just advised you, Monsieur de Taverney," he said, "and believe me, it is the best thing for you to do."

"Oh, but think of it! To believe you is to renounce the religion of my whole life; it is to accuse an angel, it is to tempt God, Doctor. If you require me to believe it, prove it, at least prove it!"

"Adieu, Monsieur."

"Doctor!" cried Philippe, in despair.

"Take care, if you speak so violently you will make known what I had determined to hide from the world, and had wished to conceal from yourself."

"Yes, yes; you are right, Doctor," said Philippe, in a tone so low that the words died on his lips; "but, indeed, science can make mistakes, and you will confess that you yourself are sometimes mistaken."

"Rarely, Monsieur," replied the doctor; "I am a man of hard study, and my lips never affirm until my eyes and my mind have said, 'I have seen, I know, I am sure.' Yes, certainly, you are right, Monsieur; sometimes I am mistaken, like every fallible creature; but according to all probability, it is not the case now. Come, be calm and let us part."

But Philippe could not be resigned. He put his hand upon the doctor's arm with such an air of entreaty that the latter stopped. "One last, one supreme favor, Monsieur," he said; "you see how agitated I am; I feel something which resembles madness; to know whether I

am going to live or die I need confirmation of that reality which threatens me. I am going to my sister; I will not speak to her until you shall have seen her again; consider."

"It is for you to consider, Monsieur; for I have not a word to add to what I have said."

"Monsieur, promise me, — my God! it is a favor that the executioner would not refuse his victim, — promise me to see my sister again after your visit to her Highness Madame la Dauphine; Doctor, in the name of Heaven promise me that!"

"It is useless, Monsieur; but if you insist, it is my duty to do what you desire. On leaving Madame la Dauphine, I will go to see your sister."

"Oh, thanks, thanks! Yes, come, and then you will confess that you have been mistaken."

"I hope so with all my heart, Monsieur; and if I am mistaken, I will confess it joyfully. Adieu." And the doctor, restored to freedom, went away, leaving Philippe upon the esplanade, shaking with fever, covered with cold perspiration, and in his delirium conscious neither of the place where he was nor of the man with whom he had been talking, nor of the secret which he had just learned. For some minutes he gazed without intelligence at the sky, gradually illumined by stars, and at the pavilion, in which lights appeared.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN INVESTIGATION.

As soon as Philippe had recovered his senses and succeeded in gaining control over his reason, he directed his steps toward the apartment of Andrée. Indeed, as he approached the pavilion the phantom of his unhappiness gradually vanished; it seemed to him a dream and not a reality against which he had for a moment struggled. The farther he went from the doctor the less he believed in his threatening intimations. Surely science was mistaken, and virtue had not failed. Had not the doctor completely justified his incredulity in promising to come to see his sister?

Nevertheless, when Philippe came into Andrée's presence he was so changed, so pale, so haggard, that she was anxious in her turn to know how so terrible a change could have taken place in him in so short a time. One thing alone could have produced such an effect on Philippe. "Good Heavens! brother," she said, "I am then very ill?"

"Why do you ask?" said Philippe.

"Because the consultation with Doctor Louis has frightened you."

"No, sister," said Philippe; "the doctor is not anxious, and you told me the truth. I could hardly induce him to come again."

"Ah, is he coming again?"

"Yes; that does not vex you, Andrée?" and Philippe, saying this, gazed into the eyes of the young girl.

"No," she replied simply, "and if it reassures you, that is all I ask; but meanwhile tell me, whence comes this frightful paleness which troubles me?"

"Does that disturb you, Andrée?"

"You ask that!"

"You love me, then, tenderly, Andrée?"

"What did you say?" said the young girl.

"I ask, Andrée, if you love me as well now as in our childhood?"

"Oh, Philippe, Philippe!"

"So I am one of the dearest friends you have on earth?"

"Oh, the dearest, the only one!" cried Andrée. Then, blushing and confused, "Excuse me, Philippe," she said, "I forgot —"

"Our father, is it not Andrée?"

"Yes."

Philippe took his sister's hand and looking at her tenderly, said, "Andrée, do not think that I should blame you if your heart held still another affection than the love you have for my father, or that you feel for me." Then sitting down by her, he continued, "You are at an age, Andrée, when the hearts of young girls are stirred more deeply than they themselves wish, and, you know, a divine precept commands women to leave parents and family to follow their husband."

Andrée looked at Philippe for some time as if he had spoken a strange language which she did not understand. Then beginning to laugh, with a simplicity nothing could describe. "My husband!" she said, "did you not say 'husband,' Philippe? Eh, *mon Dieu!* he is yet unborn, or at least, I do not know him."

Philippe touched by this exclamation of Andrée, evidently so sincere, approached her, and taking her hand

between his own he answered, "Before having a husband, my good Andrée, one must have a lover."

Andrée looked at Philippe in amazement, permitting him to gaze into the very depths of her clear, pure eyes in which her whole soul was reflected.

"My sister," said Philippe, "since your birth I have been your best friend, as you have been my only one; I never left you, to go to play with my comrades. We have grown up together, and nothing has disturbed the perfect confidence we placed in each other; why is it that for some time, Andrée, and without apparent reason, you have been so changed toward me?"

"Changed, I! I changed toward you, Philippe? Explain yourself. Indeed, I understand nothing you have said to me since you came in."

"Yes, Andrée," said the young man, pressing her to his breast; "yes, my sweet sister, the passions of youth have succeeded to the affections of childhood, and now that you are in love I am no longer worthy of your confidence."

"My brother, my friend," said Andrée, more and more astonished, "why do you say that? Why do you speak of love to me?"

"Andrée, I come courageously to a question full of dangers for you, full of anguish for me. I know very well that in asking or rather demanding your confidence at this time, I fall in your esteem; but I would rather — and believe me, it is a hard thing to say — I would rather feel that you love me less, than leave you a prey to the misfortunes which threaten you, — terrible misfortunes, Andrée, if you persist in the silence which I deplore, and of which I could not have thought you capable toward a friend, a brother."

"My brother, my friend," said Andrée, "I swear to you I do not understand your reproaches."

"Andrée, do you wish me to make you understand them?"

"Oh, yes; certainly, yes."

"Well, then, if, encouraged by you, I speak too plainly, if I call the color to your brow, and shame to weigh heavily upon your heart, blame only yourself, who have driven me by unjust distrust to search your soul to its very depths that I may tear your secret from it."

"Do so, Philippe, and I assure you that I shall not be offended."

Philippe looked at his sister, then arose and strode about the floor in great agitation. The composure of the young girl contradicted so strangely the charge against her he had made in his own mind, that he did not know what to think.

Andrée on her part contemplated her brother with astonishment, and became chilled in contact with this solemnity, so different from the sweet fraternal authority.

So, before Philippe had recovered speech, Andrée arose in her turn and went to her brother, putting her arm in his. Then looking at him with an unspeakable tenderness, she said, "Listen, Philippe, look at me as I look at you!"

"Oh, I ask nothing better," the young man replied, fixing upon her his burning eyes; "what do you wish to say to me?"

"I wish to say to you, Philippe, that you have always been a little jealous of my friendship; that is natural, since I also have been jealous of your care and affection; well, look at me as I told you to." The young girl smiled. "Do you see a secret in my eyes?" she said.

"Yes, yes, I see one," said Philippe; "Andrée, you love some one."

"I?" cried the young girl, with an expression of aston-

ishment so natural that the most skilful actress could not have imitated the accent of that utterance. And she began to laugh; "I love some one?" she said.

"Some one loves you, then?"

"Upon my word, so much the worse; for as that unknown person has never become acquainted with me and consequently has not declared himself, it is a dead waste of love."

Then, seeing his sister laugh and jest upon this question so frankly, observing the limpid blue of her eyes, the pure frankness of her demeanor, Philippe, who felt Andrée's heart beating against his with so steady a motion, said to himself that a month's absence could not make such a change in the character of an irreproachable young girl; that poor Andrée was suspected unjustly; that science lied. He confessed that there was some excuse for Doctor Louis, who did not know Andrée's purity and exquisite instincts; who thought her like all those girls of noble rank, who, fascinated by unworthy examples, or carried away by the excessive ardor of corrupted blood, surrender themselves without regret, or even without ambition.

A last glance at Andrée persuaded Philippe of the doctor's error; and he was so happy in this conviction, that he embraced his sister like those martyrs who confessed the purity of the Virgin Mary, confessing at the same time their belief in her divine Son.

While in the midst of these changes of feeling Philippe heard on the stairs the step of Doctor Louis, faithful to his promise. Andrée trembled; in her situation, everything was an event. "Who is coming?" she asked.

"Doctor Louis, probably," said Philippe.

At the same moment the door opened, and the doctor, expected so anxiously by Philippe, entered the room. He was, as we have said, one of those grave and honorable

men to whom science is a priesthood, and who study its mysteries religiously. Doctor Louis sought to discover the diseases of the soul beneath the diseases of the body, — which was an unusual thing at this very materialistic period. He went on his way boldly, gruffly, paying little attention to rumors and obstacles, economizing his time, that patrimony of laboring men, with an avarice which made him rude toward the idle and garrulous. It was for this reason that he had answered Philippe so roughly at their first interview. He had taken him for one of those fops of the court who come to fawn upon the doctor in order to procure congratulations upon their feats of prowess in love, and who are very proud of having a secret to pay for. But as soon as the medallion was turned, and instead of the fop, more or less amorous, the doctor had seen the dark, threatening face of the brother ; as soon as in the place of an offence he had seen a misfortune, — the philosophic practitioner, the man of heart, was moved, and after the last words of Philippe, the doctor had said to himself, "Not only may I have been mistaken, but I sincerely wish I may be." That is the reason why even without the urgent entreaty of Philippe, he would have come to see Andrée, to satisfy himself by a more decisive examination that his first opinion had been correct. He came in, and his first glance, that "taking possession" of the doctor and the observer, was fastened upon Andrée as he entered the antechamber, and he continued to observe her closely. Immediately, either by reason of the excitement caused by the doctor's visit, or by natural accident, Andrée was seized with one of those attacks which had frightened Philippe, and she tottered, putting her handkerchief to her lips with an expression of pain. Philippe, engaged in receiving the doctor, had not seen it. "Doctor," he said, "you are welcome. Pardon the somewhat unceremonious manner in which I addressed you, when I ac-

costed you an hour ago; I was as agitated as I am now calm."

The doctor ceased looking at Andrée for a moment, and his observation fell upon the young man, whose smile and effusiveness he tried to comprehend.

"You have talked with Mademoiselle, your sister, as I advised you?" he asked.

"Yes, Doctor, yes."

"And you are reassured?"

"I have more of heaven and less of hell in my heart."

The doctor took Andrée's hand and felt her pulse a long time.

Philippe looked on as if to say, "Oh, go on, Doctor; I dread no longer the physician's diagnosis. — Well, Monsieur?" he said, with an air of triumph.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," replied Doctor Louis, "will you leave me alone with your sister?" These words, simply pronounced, shook the young man's confidence. "What! do you still wish it?" he said.

The doctor made an affirmative gesture.

"Very well, I will leave you, Monsieur," replied Philippe, with a serious air. Then to his sister, "Andrée," he continued, "be frank and straightforward with the doctor." The young girl shrugged her shoulders as if she could not understand what he meant. Philippe continued, "While he is talking to you about your health I will take a turn in the park. The hour for which I ordered my horse has not arrived, so that I shall be able to see you again before my departure and to have a moment's conversation with you." And he pressed Andrée's hand, trying to smile. But to the young girl the pressure and the smile seemed constrained and convulsive. The doctor accompanied Philippe to the door, which he closed after him. Then he sat down on the same sofa with Andrée.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE CONSULTATION.

THE most profound silence reigned without. Not a breath of wind was stirring; not a human voice could be heard, — all Nature was still.

Andrée, in the depths of her heart, was considerably disturbed to see the importance which Philippe and the doctor attributed to this disease. She was rather surprised at the return of Doctor Louis, who that very morning had declared her illness insignificant, and remedies useless; but thanks to her deep purity, the resplendent mirror of the soul was not even dulled by the breath of all these different suspicions.

Suddenly the doctor, who had not ceased looking at her, after having turned upon her the full light of the lamp, took her hand like a friend or a confessor, no longer trying the pulse like a doctor. This unexpected movement surprised the susceptible Andrée; she came near drawing away her hand.

"Mademoiselle," asked the doctor, "did you wish to see me, or have I acceded only to the desire of your brother in coming again to see you?"

"Monsieur," replied Andrée, "my brother, on his return, informed me that you would come again to see me; but since you had done me the honor this morning to speak so lightly of my illness, I should not have taken the liberty to trouble you again."

The doctor bowed. "Monsieur, your brother," he replied, "seems very passionate, jealous of his honor and

unreasonable in some matters; that is probably the reason why you have declined to open your heart to him."

Andrée looked at the doctor as she had looked at Philippe. "You too, Monsieur?" she said, with a supreme haughtiness.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle, let me finish."

Andrée made a gesture of impatience, or rather of resignation.

"It is, then, natural," continued the doctor, "that, seeing the sorrow and dreading the anger of this young man, you have obstinately kept your secret; but with me, Mademoiselle, — with me, who am, you may well believe, the doctor of souls as well as of bodies; with me, who see and who know; with me, who, consequently, meet you half-way on the difficult road of confession, — with me, I have the right to expect that you will be more frank."

"Monsieur," replied Andrée, "if I had not seen my brother's face grow sad and take on the expression of a real sorrow; if I did not consider your grave appearance and the reputation for seriousness which you enjoy, — I should think that you were putting your heads together to play a comedy at my expense, and to make me take, after a consultation, through the fear which you would have caused me, some very black and bitter medicine."

The doctor frowned. "Mademoiselle," he said, "I beg you, stop short in this course of dissimulation."

"Dissimulation!" cried Andrée.

"Would you prefer to have me call it hypocrisy?"

"But, Monsieur," cried the young girl, "you insult me!"

"Say that I understand you."

"Monsieur!" Andrée rose, but the doctor forced her gently, to sit down again.

"No," he continued, "no, my child, I do not insult

you, — I serve you; and if I convince you, I save you! So neither your expression of anger nor your pretended indignation will change my resolution."

"But what do you wish? What do you demand?"

"Confess, or, upon my honor, I shall have a very bad opinion of you."

"Monsieur, once more, my brother is not here to defend me, and I say that you insult me, that I do not understand, and that I demand a clear and complete explanation in regard to this pretended disease."

"For the last time, Mademoiselle," replied the astonished doctor, "will you not spare me the pain of making you blush?"

"I do not understand! I do not understand! I do not understand!" Andrée exclaimed three times, with flashing eyes, which questioned, defied, and almost threatened.

"Well, I understand about you, Mademoiselle; you doubt science, and you hope to conceal your condition from the world. But, be undeceived, with one single word I will humble all your pride, — you are enceinte!"

Andrée uttered a terrible cry, and fell back on the sofa. This cry was followed by the sound of a door opened with violence, and Philippe bounded into the middle of the room, sword in hand, with blood-shot eyes and trembling lips. "Scoundrel!" he said to the doctor, "you lie!"

The doctor turned slowly toward the young man without letting go the scarcely beating pulse of Andrée. "I have said what I have said, Monsieur," he replied, "and the fear of your sword, naked or sheathed, will not make me say what is not true."

"Doctor!" murmured Philippe, letting his sword fall.

"You wished me to verify by a second trial my first examination; I have done so. Now that certainty is established, nothing can destroy my faith in it. I regret it

extremely, young man; for you have inspired me as much with sympathy as this young girl has inspired me with aversion, through her persistence in falsehood."

Philippe started, but Andrée was motionless.

"I am a family man, Monsieur," continued the doctor, "and I understand how much you must suffer. I offer you my services, then, and I promise secrecy. My word is sacred, Monsieur, and everybody will tell you that I think more of my word than of my life."

"Oh! but, Monsieur, it is impossible!"

"I do not know whether it is impossible; but it is true. Adieu, Monsieur de Taverney." And the doctor turned away with the same steady and slow step, looking affectionately at the young man, who was writhing with pain, and who, as soon as the door was shut, sank overcome with grief into a chair two steps from Andrée.

The doctor having gone, Philippe arose, shut the doors of the corridor and of the chamber, closed the windows, and approaching Andrée, who was astonished to see him making these inauspicious preparations, "You have deceived me in a stupid and cowardly manner," he said, folding his arms, — "cowardly, because I am your brother, because I was so weak as to love you, to prefer you to all, to esteem you above all, and because this confidence on my part ought at least to call forth your own, even if affection could not inspire it; stupidly, because now the infamous secret which dishonors us is in the power of a third person; because in spite of your secrecy it may have been seen by others; because, in short, if you had confessed your situation to me at first, I might have saved you from shame, if not through affection for you, at least for my own sake; for indeed I should save myself in saving you. See, now, the full measure of your guilt. Your honor, so long as you are not married, is shared by

all those whose name you bear, — that is to say, whose name you soil. Now, then, I am no longer your brother, since you have denied me that right; now, I am a man interested in wresting from you by all possible means the whole secret, so that from this confession may spring forth for myself some reparation. I come, then, to you full of anger and resolution, and I say to you, Since you have been coward enough to trust in a lie, you will be punished as cowards are punished. Confess, then, your crime, or — "

"Threats!" cried the proud Andrée, — "threats to a woman!" and she arose pale and threatening herself.

"Yes, threats, — not to a woman, but to a creature without honesty, without honor."

"Threats!" continued Andrée, gradually becoming exasperated, — "threats to me, who know nothing, who understand nothing, who regard you all as bloodthirsty lunatics, conspiring together to kill me with grief, if not with shame!"

"Well, yes!" cried Philippe; "die, then! die, then, unless you confess, — die this instant! God judges you, and I will strike you;" and the young man took up, convulsively, his sword, and quick as lightning placed the point at his sister's breast.

"Well, well, kill me!" she cried, without showing fear of the light which flashed from the blade, without trying to avoid the pain of the wound; and she threw herself forward, full of grief and madness, and her movement was so quick that the sword would have pierced her breast if it had not been for the sudden terror of Philippe, and the sight of drops of blood which stained the muslin thrown around his sister's neck. The young man had lost his strength and his anger; he started back, dropped his sword, and falling on his knees, sobbing, he put his arms around the body of the young girl.

"Andrée! Andrée!" he cried, "no, no! it is I who will die! You love me no longer, you know me no more; I have nothing more to do in this world. Oh, you love some one so much, Andrée, that you prefer death to confiding in me! Oh, Andrée, you shall not die! it is I who will die;" and he attempted to escape, but already Andrée had put both arms about his neck, beside herself, covering him with kisses, bathing him with tears.

"No, no," she said; "you were right at first. Kill me, Philippe, for they say that I am guilty. But you, so noble, so pure, so good, — you whom no one accuses, live and pity me instead of cursing me."

"Well, sister," replied the young man, "in the name of Heaven, in the name of our former friendship, come, fear nothing, neither for yourself nor for him whom you love; he, whoever he may be, shall be sacred to me, were he my greatest enemy, were he the vilest of men. But I have no enemy, Andrée; and you are so noble in heart and thought that your lover must be well chosen. Well, I will go to find him, I will call him brother. You say nothing; do you mean that marriage between you and him is impossible? Well, so be it! I will be resigned; I will keep all my grief to myself; I will stifle this imperious voice of honor which demands blood. I ask you nothing, not even the name of this man. You have loved this man, therefore he is dear to me — Only, let us leave France, let us go together. The king has given you a valuable present, they say; well, we will sell it; we will send half of the money to our father; then with the other half we will live unknown. I will be all to you, Andrée; you shall be all to me. I love no one; you see that I am devoted to you, Andrée; you see what I am doing; you see that you can rely on my friendship, — come, will you refuse me still your confidence, after what I have just said to you? Come, come, will you not call me your brother?"

Andrée had listened in silence to what the distracted young man had said. The beating of her heart alone gave sign of life; her look alone indicated reason.

"Philippe," she said, after a long silence, "you thought that I loved you no longer, poor brother! you thought that I loved another man; you thought that I had forgotten the law of honor, — I, who am a girl of noble birth, and who understand all the duties that word imposes upon me! My dear, I forgive you. Yes, yes; in vain have you believed me base; in vain have you called me cowardly. Yes, yes, I forgive you; but I will not forgive you if you believe me so impious, so vile as to swear falsely to you. I swear to you, Philippe, by the God who hears me, by the soul of my mother, — which has not sufficiently protected me, alas! as it would seem, — I swear to you by my ardent love for you, that never a thought of love has distracted my reason; that never has a man said to me, 'I love you;' that never have lips kissed my hand; that I am pure in mind, virgin in desire as on the day of my birth. Now, Philippe, God has my soul, take you my body in your hands."

"It is well," said Philippe, after a long silence, — "it is well, Andrée, I thank you. Now I see clearly into the very depths of your heart. Yes, you are pure, innocent, dear victim; but there are magic drinks, poisoned philtres; some one has set for you an infamous trap; some one has taken from you in your sleep that which living no one could have torn from you but with your life. You have fallen into some snare, Andrée; but now we are united, consequently we are strong. You trust to me the care of your honor and of your vengeance, do you not?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Andrée, quickly, with bitter emphasis; "yes, for if you avenge me it will be for a crime."

"Well," continued Philippe, "aid me, support me.

Let us search together; let us go back hour by hour over the past days; let us follow the helpful thread of memory, and at the first clew — "

"Oh, I wish it! I wish it!" said Andrée; "let us search."

"Well, have you noticed any one following you, watching you?"

"No."

"No one has written to you?"

"No one."

"No man has told you he loved you?"

"No one."

"Women have a remarkable instinct in this respect; have you ever noticed that any one — desired you?"

"I have never noticed anything of the kind."

"Dear sister, search the circumstances of your life, its inmost details."

"Lead me."

"Have you walked out alone?"

"Never, that I can remember, except to go to see Madame la Dauphine."

"When you went off into the park, into the woods?"

"Nicole always accompanied me."

"Speaking of Nicole, she has left you?"

"Yes."

"On what day?"

"The very day of your departure, I think."

"She was a girl of questionable conduct; do you know the particulars of her flight? Think carefully."

"I only know that she went off with her lover."

"What were your last relations with that girl?"

"Oh, at nine o'clock, she came as usual into my chamber, undressed me, prepared my glass of water, and went out."

"You did not notice whether she mixed any cordial with the water?"

"No; besides, that circumstance would have had no importance, for I remember that at the moment when I lifted the glass to my lips, I experienced a very strange sensation."

"What was it like?"

"Like that I experienced one day at Taverney."

"At Taverney?"

"Yes, when that stranger was passing by."

"What stranger?"

"Comte de Balsamo."

"Comte de Balsamo? And what was this sensation?"

"Oh, something like vertigo, like dizziness; then the loss of all my faculties."

"And you felt this impression at Taverney, you say?"

"Yes."

"Under what circumstances?"

"I was at my piano; I felt myself fainting; I looked before me and saw the count in a mirror. From that moment I remember nothing more, except that when I awoke I was still at the piano, and could not judge of the length of my sleep."

"It is the only time, you say, that you experienced this singular sensation?"

"Once more, on the day or rather the night of the fireworks. I was dragged along by all that crowd, upon the point of being crushed, destroyed; I collected all my strength for the struggle; all at once my arms relaxed, a cloud enveloped my eyes, but through this cloud I had yet time to see this very man."

"The Comte de Balsamo?"

"Yes."

"And you went to sleep?"

"I went to sleep or fainted, I cannot tell which. You know how he carried me away, and brought me back to my father."

"Yes, yes; and that night, — the night that Nicole went away, — did you see him then?"

"No; but I experienced all the symptoms which gave notice of his presence, — the same strange sensations, the same nervous dizziness, the same torpor, the same sleep."

"The same sleep?"

"Yes, sleep full of vertigos, of which, even while struggling against them, I recognized the mysterious source before yielding to them."

"Great God!" cried Philippe, "go on, go on!"

"I went to sleep."

"Where did you go to sleep?"

"On my own bed, I am very sure; and I awoke upon the floor, alone, ill, and cold, like a dead person reviving. I called Nicole, but in vain; Nicole had disappeared."

"And this sleep was the very same?"

"Yes."

"The same as at Taverney? the same as on the day of the fêtes?"

"Yes, yes."

"On the first two occasions, just before yielding, you had seen this Joseph Balsamo, this Comte de Fenix?"

"Certainly."

"And the third time you did not see him?"

"No," said Andrée, in terror, for she was beginning to understand; "no, but I felt his presence."

"Good!" cried Philippe; "now be calm, be reassured, be proud, Andrée; I know the secret. Thanks, dear sister, thanks. Ah, we are saved!"

Philippe took Andrée in his arms, pressed her tenderly to his heart, and carried away by the ardor of resolution, he rushed out of the chamber. He ran to the stables, saddled his horse himself, mounted, and took in great haste the road to Paris.

CHAPTER XLV.

GILBERT'S CONSCIENCE.

All the scenes we have just described had reacted powerfully upon Gilbert. The unbalanced susceptibility of this young man was subjected to too severe a trial when, in the depths of the retreat which he knew how to choose in some corner of the garden, he saw every day the progress of the disease on the face and in the step of Andrée; when this paleness, which had alarmed him the evening before, seemed next morning more marked, more accusing, when Mademoiselle de Taverney came to the window to get the first rays of the morning sun. Then whoever had observed Gilbert's countenance would not have failed to see in it the characteristic traits of that remorse which was so favorite a subject among the painters of antiquity.

Gilbert loved the beauty of Andrée, and on the other hand he detested it. This brilliant beauty, together with so many other superior qualities, established a new barrier between him and the young girl; nevertheless this beauty seemed to him a new treasure to acquire. Such were the reasons for his love and his hatred, for his desire and his scorn.

But from the time this beauty was sullied, when the features of Andrée became a revelation of suffering, or of shame, from the time when there was danger for Andrée, danger for Gilbert, the situation was wholly changed; and Gilbert, who was eminently just, changed also his point of view. We may say that his first feeling was one of

profound sadness. He did not see without pain the beauty of his mistress fading, her health failing. He experienced the delicious pride of pitying this haughty woman, so scornful of him, and of rewarding her with compassion for all the opprobrium with which she had loaded him. But we do not on this account make excuses for Gilbert; pride justifies nothing. But pride was not the only sentiment in Gilbert's heart as he confronted the situation. Every time that Mademoiselle de Taverney, pale, suffering, and sad, appeared like a phantom before the eyes of Gilbert, his heart leaped, the blood rushed to his eyelids like tears, and he pressed to his breast a clinched, restless hand, which tried to restrain the revolt of his conscience.

"It is through me that she is ruined," he murmured. And devouring her with a furious look, he fled, imagining all the time that he could see her, and hear her groan. Then he was stricken to the heart; he experienced one of the most poignant griefs that it is given man to endure. His furious love needed consolation, and he would have given his life for the right to fall on his knees before Andrée, to take her by the hand, to console her, to recall her to life when she fainted. His powerlessness on these occasions was a punishment, the tortures of which no words could describe. Gilbert bore this martyrdom three days. On the first day he had noticed the change, the slow working of the disease on Andrée. Where others saw nothing more, he, the cause, could divine and interpret everything. More than this, he had studied the course of the disease, and could calculate the exact time of the crisis.

The day of Andrée's faintings he spent in frights, in agitations, in wild wanderings, — certain indications of a conscience at bay. All this running to and fro, these airs of indifference or of eagerness, these bursts of sympathy or

sarcasm which Gilbert considered as master-pieces of dissimulation and manœuvring, any clerk of the Châtelet, any turnkey of Saint Lazare, would have analyzed and interpreted them as the ferret of Monsieur de Sartines could read and write cipher. One does not see a man run until out of breath, then suddenly stop, utter inarticulate sounds, then plunge all at once into the deepest silence, — one does not see him listening in the air for indifferent sounds, or dig the ground, or hack the trees in rage, without thinking of him, "This man is mad if he is not a culprit."

After this first outpouring of remorse, Gilbert had passed from commiseration to egotism. He knew that these frequent fainting fits of Andrée would not seem to be a natural sickness, and that the cause of them would be sought for. Gilbert called to mind the brutal and expeditious forms of justice which investigate all kinds of crime which can dishonor a man, — the questions, the examinations, the analogies unknown to the rest of the world, and which put on the track of a criminal those blood-hounds, full of resources, called "instructors." Now that which Gilbert had done seemed to him morally most odious and deserving of punishment. He began to tremble in earnest; for he feared that the sickness of Andrée would instigate inquiry. From this time, like the criminal in that celebrated picture pursued by the angel of remorse by the pale light of his torch, Gilbert cast frightened looks upon everything about him. He was suspicious; every sound and every whisper, every word he heard spoken, however insignificant, seemed to have some relation to Mademoiselle de Taverney or to himself.

He had seen Monsieur de Richelieu go to see the king, and Monsieur de Taverney go to visit his daughter. The

house had seemed on that day to take on an extraordinary air of conspiracy and suspicion. It was still worse when he saw the doctor and the dauphiness repair to the chamber of Andrée. Gilbert was one of those sceptics who believe in nothing. He cared but little for God or man; but he recognized science as God, and proclaimed its omnipotence. There were times when Gilbert would have denied the infallible knowledge of the Supreme Being; he never doubted the clear-sightedness of the doctor. The visit of Doctor Louis to Andrée was a blow from which Gilbert's mind could not recover. He ran to his chamber, leaving his work, and deaf as a statue to the injunctions of his superiors. There, behind the poor curtain which he had improvised to conceal his spyings, he addressed all his faculties to the endeavor to discover a word or movement which would reveal the result of the consultation. Nothing happened which would enlighten him. Only once he saw the face of the dauphiness, who came to the window to take a look at the court, which she had probably never seen. He could also see Doctor Louis opening this window to let into the chamber a little fresh air. As for hearing what was said, or seeing the expression of their faces, that was not possible; a thick curtain, which served as a blind, fell the whole length of the window, and prevented all knowledge of what was going on.

The anguish of the young man may be conceived. The doctor, with the eye of a lynx, had solved the mystery. Disclosure must follow, not immediately, as Gilbert justly supposed, on account of the presence of the dauphiness, but very soon between the father and daughter when the two visitors should leave them alone. Gilbert, wild with grief and impatience, beat his head against the walls of his garret. He saw Monsieur de Taverney go out with Madame la Dauphine, the doctor having already left.

"The explanation will take place between Monsieur de Taverney and the dauphiness," he said to himself.

The baron did not return to his daughter, Andrée remained alone in her room, and spent the time upon her sofa, partly in reading, interrupted by spasms and headaches, partly in meditations so deep and quiet that Gilbert took them for trances, when he caught a glimpse of her through an opening in the curtain which the wind occasionally blew aside.

Andrée, worn out with pain and emotion, went to sleep. Gilbert profited by this respite to go out of doors to gather rumors and comments. This time was precious to him, because it gave him opportunity for reflection. The danger was so imminent that he must combat it by a sudden, heroic resolution. This was the first point of support upon which this mind, vacillating because subtle, found strength and tranquillity. But what resolution to take? Any change, in such circumstances, would attract attention. Flight? Ah, yes! flight, with that energy of youth, that vigor of despair and of fear, which doubles the strength of a man and renders it equal to that of an army, — hide by day, travel by night, and arrive at length — where? In what place could he hide where the avenging arm of justice could not find him?

Gilbert knew the customs of the country. What would they think in countries almost savage, almost deserted, — for as to cities he must not think of them, — what would they think in a small town, a hamlet, of the stranger who comes some day to beg his bread, or whom they suspect of stealing it? And then Gilbert knew himself by heart, — a noticeable face, a face which henceforth would bear the indelible impress of a terrible secret, would attract the attention of every observer. To fly was already a danger; but to be discovered was a disgrace.

Flight would condemn him; he rejected this idea, and as if his mind had strength for only one idea, the unhappy man, after dismissing the idea of flight, entertained that of death. It was the first time he had thought of it; the apparition of this lugubrious phantom he had evoked occasioned him no fear. "It will be time enough to think of death when all resources are exhausted. Besides, it is cowardly to kill one's self. Rousseau has said, 'To suffer is more noble.'" With the utterance of this paradox, Gilbert raised his head and renewed his wandering course through the gardens. He had obtained the first glimpse of security, when, all at once, Philippe, arriving as we have seen, overturned all his ideas, and threw him into a fresh series of perplexities.

The brother, the brother sent for! it has been then satisfactorily proved! The family have determined on silence. Yes; but with all the investigations, all the refinement of details which for Gilbert meant the tortures of the Conciergerie, of the Châtelet, and of the Tournelle. They would drag him before Andrée; they would force him to kneel, to confess ignominiously his crime; and they would kill him like a dog with a cudgel or knife, — a legitimate vengeance justified in advance by numerous precedents.

Louis XV. was very indulgent to the nobility in such cases. And then Philippe was the most formidable avenger that Mademoiselle de Taverney could call to her aid. Philippe, who alone of the family had shown toward Gilbert the sentiments of a man and almost of an equal, — would not Philippe as surely kill the criminal with a word as with the sword; if this word were, "Gilbert, you have eaten of our bread, and you have dishonored us!"

So we have seen Gilbert stealing away at the first appearance of Philippe; and in returning he obeyed only

his instinct not to accuse himself; and from that moment, he concentrated all his strength into a single purpose, — resistance. He followed Philippe, saw him go to the apartments of Andrée, and talk with Doctor Louis; he watched everything, judged everything, understood the despair of Philippe. He saw that grief spring up and increase; his terrible scene with Andrée he discovered from the play of the shadows behind the curtains. "I am lost," he thought. And immediately, his reason wandering, he seized a knife to kill Philippe whom he expected to see appear at his door, or to kill himself, if necessary.

But, on the contrary, Philippe was reconciled with his sister. Gilbert saw him on his knees kissing Andrée's hands; here was a fresh hope, a door of safety. If Philippe had not come up to him with cries of rage, it was because Andrée was wholly ignorant of the name of the criminal. If she, the only witness, the only accuser, knew nothing, why no one knew anything. If Andrée, foolish hope, knew and did not speak, it was more than safety, — it was happiness, it was triumph. From this moment Gilbert rose to the level of the situation. Nothing arrested his progress now that he had recovered his clearness of vision. "Where is the evidence," he said, "if Mademoiselle de Taverney does not accuse me? And, fool that I am, is it the result she will accuse me of, or the crime itself? Now, she has not reproached me for the crime; nothing for three weeks past has indicated to me that she detested me, or avoided me more than formerly. If, then, she has not known the cause, nothing in the effect will point to me more than to another. I saw the king himself in the chamber of Mademoiselle Andrée. I will prove it, if need be, to the brother, and in spite of every denial of his Majesty, they will believe me. Yes; but this would be a dangerous

game. I will be silent; the king has too many ways of proving his innocence, or of crushing my evidence. But in default of the king, whose name cannot be brought into this affair under pain of imprisonment for life, or of death, have I not that unknown man who the same night led Mademoiselle de Taverney into the garden? This man, how will he defend himself? What will be their reason for suspecting him? How will they find him if they do suspect him? He is but an ordinary man; I am as good as he, and I will defend myself stoutly against him. Besides, they will not even think of me. God alone saw me," he added, laughing bitterly; "but this God who so often sees my grief and my tears without saying anything, why should he be so unjust as to betray me on this first chance for happiness that he has given me? Moreover, if there has been a crime, it is his, and not mine; and Monsieur de Voltaire proves incontestably that there are no longer any miracles. I am saved, I am calm; my secret is my own, the future is mine." After these reflections, or rather this compromise with his conscience, Gilbert locked up his garden-tools, and took his evening meal with his companions. He was gay, careless, defiant even. He had had remorse, he had been afraid, — a two-fold weakness which a man, a philosopher, must hasten to forget. Only he reckoned without his conscience; Gilbert did not sleep.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TWO GRIEFS.

GILBERT had rightly judged the position when he said, speaking of the unknown man surprised by him in the gardens on that evening which had been so fatal to Mademoiselle de Taverney, "Will they find him?" In fact Philippe was wholly ignorant of the place of residence of Joseph Balsamo, Comte de Fenix. But he remembered that lady of quality, that Marquise de Savigny, to whom, on the thirtieth of May, Andrée had been conducted to be cared for. It was not yet too late to present himself at the house of this lady, who lived in the Rue Saint Honoré. Philippe restrained the agitation of his mind and of his senses; he ascended to the apartments of the lady, and the servant gave him immediately without hesitation the address of Balsamo, Rue Saint Claude, au Marais. Philippe hastened directly to the address indicated.

But it was not without profound emotion that he touched the knocker of this suspicious house, where, as he thought, were forever buried the repose and honor of poor Andrée. But with an appeal to his will he had sufficiently overcome indignation and emotion to preserve the strength which he was sure to need. He knocked, then, with a firm hand at the gate of the house which, according to the custom of the place, flew open. Philippe entered the court, holding his horse by the bridle. But he had not taken four steps when Fritz, coming out from the vestibule

and appearing at the top of the steps, stopped him with this question, "What does Monsieur want?"

Philippe trembled as if he had met with an unforeseen obstacle. He looked at the German, knitting his brow as if Fritz had not performed his simple duty as an attendant.

"I wish to speak to the master of the house, — to Comte de Fenix," replied Philippe, passing the bridle of his horse through a ring, and walking toward the house, which he entered.

"Monsieur is not at home," said Fritz, letting Philippe pass, however, with the politeness of a well-trained servant. Strange thing! Philippe seemed to have anticipated nothing less than this simple reply. He remained for a moment abashed. "Where can I find him?" he asked.

"I do not know, Monsieur."

"But you ought to know."

"I beg pardon, Monsieur does not account to me for his movements."

"My friend," said Philippe, "I must, however, speak to your master this evening."

"I doubt if it is possible."

"It must be; it is on business of the greatest importance."

Fritz bowed without answering.

"He has gone out, then?" asked Philippe.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"He will return of course?"

"I think not, Monsieur."

"Ah, you think not?"

"Yes."

"Very well," said Philippe, growing impatient; "meanwhile go tell your master —"

"But I have the honor of informing you," replied the imperturbable Fritz, "that Monsieur is not here."

"I know the importance of orders, my friend," said Philippe, "and yours ought to be regarded; but it cannot indeed apply to me, whose visit your master could not anticipate, and who come here accidentally."

"The order is for everybody, Monsieur," replied Fritz, blundering.

"Then since there is an order," said Philippe, "the Comte de Fenix is here?"

"Well, what then?" said Fritz, becoming impatient in his turn at such persistence.

"Why, I will wait for him."

"Monsieur is not here, I tell you," he replied; "the house took fire some time ago, and consequently it is not habitable."

"You live in it, however," said Philippe, blundering in his turn.

"I live here as keeper."

Philippe shrugged his shoulders like a man who does not believe a word of what is told him. Fritz began to get angry. "For the rest," he said, "whether Monsieur le Comte is here or not, it is not usual for persons to enter his house by force; and if you do not conform to custom, I shall be obliged —" Fritz stopped.

"To what?" asked Philippe, forgetting himself.

"To put you out," replied Fritz, calmly.

"You?" cried Philippe, his eyes flashing.

"I!" replied Fritz, resuming with the characteristic of his nation every appearance of coolness in proportion as his anger increased. And he took a step toward the young man, who, exasperated beyond control, drew his sword. Fritz, not alarmed at the sight of the blade, without calling for help, — he might, indeed, have been alone, —

seized from an armory a sort of stake armed with a short but sharp blade, and throwing himself upon Philippe like a cudgel-player rather than a fencer, he broke into a thousand pieces, at the first stroke, the blade of that little sword. Philippe uttered a cry of rage, and rushing in his turn toward the armory, tried to seize a weapon from it. At this moment the secret door of the corridor was opened, and the count appeared coming out from the shadow.

"What is the matter, Fritz?" he asked.

"Nothing, Monsieur," replied the servant, putting down his stick, but placing himself like a barrier before his master, who, standing on the steps of the private staircase, was more elevated than he by half his height.

"Monsieur le Comte de Fenix," said Philippe, "is it the custom in your country for lackeys to receive a gentleman spear in hand, or is it an order peculiar to your noble mansion?"

Fritz lowered his spear, and at a sign from his master put it in the corner of the vestibule.

"Who are you, Monsieur?" asked the count, who could scarcely see Philippe in the faint light of the lamp which lighted the antechamber.

"Some one who insists on speaking with you."

"Who insists?"

"Yes."

"That is a word which fully excuses Fritz, Monsieur; for I wish to speak to no one, and when I am at home I do not recognize the right of any one to insist on speaking to me. You are then guilty of a wrong toward me; but," Balsamo added with a sigh, "I pardon you, — on the condition, however, that you retire and trouble me no more."

"It well becomes you, indeed," cried Philippe, "to ask for peace, — you, who have destroyed mine."

"I have destroyed your peace?"

"I am Philippe de Taverney!" cried the young man, thinking that to the conscience of the count this name would explain everything.

"Philippe de Taverney? Monsieur," said the count, "I was well received at your father's house, you are welcome to mine."

"Ah, that is very fortunate," murmured Philippe.

"Please to follow me, Monsieur."

Balsamo shut the door of the private staircase, and preceding Philippe, he conducted him to the salon, where some of the scenes of this story have been unfolded to our view, — particularly the most recent of all which had taken place there, that of the Five Masters. The salon was lighted up as if some one had been expected; but it was evident that this was one of the luxurious customs of the house.

"Good evening, Monsieur de Taverney," said Balsamo, in a tone so mild and suppressed that Philippe involuntarily looked up at him. But at the sight of Balsamo he stepped back. The count indeed was but the shadow of himself, — his hollow eyes had no lustre; his cheeks, in growing thin, had encircled the mouth with two folds, and the facial angle, bare and bony, made the whole head look like a death's head. Philippe was astounded. Balsamo saw his astonishment, and a smile of mortal sadness passed over his white lips. "Monsieur," he said, "let me apologize for my servant; but indeed he followed his orders, and you — allow me to say so — were wrong in forcing him."

"Monsieur," said Philippe, "there are, you know, in life extreme situations, and I was in one of these situations." Balsamo did not answer. "I wished to see you," continued Philippe; "I wished to speak to you; I would have braved death in order to gain admission to you."

Balsamo remained silent and seemed to await an explanation of the words of the young man, without having the strength or the curiosity to ask for it.

"I have you now," continued Philippe, — "I have you now at length, and we will come to an explanation if you please; but in the first place be so good as to dismiss that man." And Philippe pointed to Fritz, who had just raised the portière as if to ask his master his last orders respecting the importunate visitor.

Balsamo fixed upon Philippe a look, the object of which was to discover his intentions; but finding himself in the presence of a man his equal in rank and distinction, Philippe had recovered calmness and presence of mind; he was impenetrable. Balsamo, therefore, by a simple motion of the head, or rather eyebrows, dismissed Fritz, and the two men sat down opposite each other, Philippe with his back to the fireplace, Balsamo with his elbow resting on a small table.

"Speak quickly, and clearly, if you please, Monsieur," said Balsamo, "for I listen to you only through kindness, and I warn you that I shall be quickly fatigued."

"I shall speak as I ought, Monsieur, and as long as I think proper," said Philippe; "and with your permission, I will begin with a question."

At this word a terrible frown shot from the eyes of Balsamo an electric flash. This word brought to his mind such memories that Philippe would have trembled if he had known what commotion he had excited in the depths of this man's heart. However, after a moment's silence to gain command over himself, Balsamo said, "Ask your question."

"Monsieur," replied Philippe, "you have never explained satisfactorily how you spent the time during that famous night of the thirtieth of May, from the moment

when you raised my sister from among the dying and the dead who crowded the Place Louis XV.?"

"What does that signify?" asked Balsamo.

"It signifies, Monsieur le Comte, that your whole conduct on that night has been and is now more than ever subject to suspicion."

"Suspicion?"

"Yes; and in all probability, it has not been the conduct of a man of honor."

"Monsieur," said Balsamo, "I do not understand you; you must see that my head is weary, weak, and that this weakness naturally makes me impatient."

"Monsieur!" cried Philippe, in his turn irritated by Balsamo's tone, at once haughty and calm.

"Monsieur," continued Balsamo, in the same tone, "since I last had the honor of seeing you I have met with a great misfortune: my house has been partly burned, and I have lost many precious treasures, — very precious, understand; in consequence of this trouble I am somewhat confused. Be, therefore, very clear, I beg, or I shall take leave of you immediately."

"Oh, no, Monsieur," said Philippe, "no, you will not take leave of me so easily as you say. I shall respect your sorrow if you show yourself considerate of mine; to me, also, Monsieur, there has come a great misfortune, — much greater than yours, I am sure."

Balsamo smiled with that smile of despair which Philippe had already seen upon his lips.

"I, Monsieur," continued Philippe, "have lost the honor of my family."

"Well, Monsieur," replied Balsamo, "how can I help you in this misfortune?"

"How can you help me?" cried Philippe, with flashing eyes.

"Certainly."

"You can restore me what I have lost, Monsieur!"

"Ah, you are mad, Monsieur!" cried Balsamo, and he reached for the bell. But he made this movement so gently and with so little anger that Philippe's arm easily stopped him.

"I am mad?" cried Philippe, in an angry tone. "But you do not understand that I refer to my sister, whom you held fainting in your arms on the thirtieth of May, — my sister, whom you conveyed to a house, which you said was respectable, but, as I think, infamous, — to my sister, in a word, whose honor I demand sword in hand?"

Balsamo shrugged his shoulders. "Eh, good God!" he murmured, "how many turnings to reach a thing so simple!"

"Scoundrel!" cried Philippe.

"What a deplorable voice you have, Monsieur!" said Balsamo, with the same gloomy impatience; "you stun me. Why, you do not come here to tell me that I have insulted your sister?"

"Yes, coward!"

"Again an exclamation, and a useless insult, Monsieur; who the devil has told you that I have insulted your sister?"

Philippe hesitated; the tone with which Balsamo pronounced these words amazed him. It was the height of impudence, or it was the cry of a clear conscience. "Who told me?" replied the young man.

"Yes, I demand it of you."

"My sister herself, Monsieur."

"Well, Monsieur, your sister — "

"You are about to say?" cried Philippe, with a threatening gesture.

"I was about to say, Monsieur, that you give me a very

poor idea both of yourself and your sister. It is the worst speculation in the world, do you know, that which certain women make on their dishonor. Now you have come with insult in your mouth, like the bearded brothers of the Italian comedy, sword in hand, to force me either to marry your sister, which shows that she is in great want of a husband, or to give you money because you know that I make gold. Well, you are very much mistaken on both points, — you will not have money, and your sister will remain unmarried."

"Then, I will have the blood which flows in your veins," cried Philippe, "if there is any."

"No, not even that, Monsieur."

"Why not?"

"The blood I have, I keep, and I could have had, if I wished, a cause for shedding it more serious than the one you offer me. Therefore, Monsieur, do me the favor to return peacefully; and if you make a noise, as the noise will make my head ache, I shall call Fritz. Fritz will come, and at a sign from me, he will break you in two like a twig. Go!" This time Balsamo rang, and as Philippe tried to prevent him, he opened an ebony box sitting on the little table, and took from it a double-barrelled pistol.

"Well, I like that better," cried Philippe; "kill me!"

"Why should I kill you?"

"Because you have dishonored me." The young man pronounced, in his turn, these words with such an accent of truth that Balsamo, looking at him with eyes full of kindness, said, "Is it possible then that you are in earnest?"

"You doubt it? you doubt the word of a gentleman?"

"And that Mademoiselle de Taverney could have herself conceived this infamous idea, and that she could have urged you to carry it out? Well, if it be so, I will give

you satisfaction. I swear to you on my honor that my conduct toward Mademoiselle your sister on the night of the thirtieth of May was irreproachable; that neither honor, nor human tribunal, nor divine justice, could discover in it anything contrary to the most perfect probity; do you believe me?"

"Monsieur!" said the young man, astonished.

"You know that I do not fear a duel, — you read that in my eyes, do you not? As to my weakness, do not be deceived; it is only apparent. I have little blood in my face, it is true; but my muscles have lost nothing of their strength. Do you wish for a proof of it? See!" And Balsamo raised with a single hand, and without effort, an enormous bronze vase placed on a stand carved by Boule.

"Well, so be it, Monsieur," said Philippe; "I believe you as to the thirtieth of May. But you employ subterfuge; you take advantage of an error in time. Since that you have seen my sister again."

Balsamo hesitated in his turn. "It is true," said he, "I have seen her since;" and his brow, clear for a moment, grew dark in a terrible manner.

"Ah, you see plainly!" said Philippe.

"Well, I have seen your sister again. What does that prove against me?"

"It proves that you have put her into this inexplicable sleep, of which, three times already, at your approach, she has felt the effect, and that you have taken advantage of this insensibility to cover the secret of your crime."

"Once more, who says that?" cried Balsamo.

"My sister."

"How does she know it, since she was asleep?"

"Ah, you confess, then, that she was put to sleep?"

"More, Monsieur; I confess to having magnetized her myself."

"Magnetized her?"

"Yes."

"And with what object, if not to dishonor her?"

"With what object, alas!" said Balsamo, dropping his head upon his breast.

"Speak, speak, then!"

"With the object, Monsieur, of making her reveal a secret which was more precious to me than life."

"Oh, trickery, subterfuge!"

"And it was during this night," continued Balsamo, following out his own thought, rather than answering Philippe's insulting question, "that your sister—"

"Was dishonored; yes, Monsieur."

"Dishonored?"

"My sister is a mother!"

Balsamo uttered a cry. "Oh, true, true!" said he, "I remember; I went off without waking her."

"You confess! you confess!" cried Philippe.

"And some villain, during that terrible night,—oh, terrible for us all, Monsieur!—took advantage of her sleep."

"Ah! would you mock me, Monsieur?"

"No; I would convince you."

"That will be difficult."

"Where is your sister at this moment?"

"There, where you so conveniently discovered her."

"At Trianon?"

"Yes."

"I will go to Trianon with you, Monsieur."

Philippe was motionless with astonishment.

"I have committed a fault, Monsieur, but I am guiltless of crime. I left that child in a magnetic sleep. Well, as satisfaction for this fault, which may justly be forgiven me, I myself will tell you the name of the guilty man."

"Tell it! tell it!"

"I do not know it myself," said Balsamo.

"Who does know it, then?"

"Your sister."

"But she has refused to tell me."

"Perhaps, but she will tell it to me."

"My sister?"

"If your sister accuses any one, will you believe her?"

"Yes; for my sister is an angel of purity."

Balsamo rang. "Fritz, a carriage," said he, when the German appeared.

Philippe paced the room like a madman. "The guilty one!" said he; "you promise to inform me who he is?"

"Monsieur," said Balsamo, "your sword has been broken in the struggle. Permit me to offer you another;" and he took from a chair a magnificent sword, with hilt of silver-gilt, which he drew through Philippe's belt.

"But you?" said the young man.

"I, Monsieur, do not need weapons," replied Balsamo; "my defence is at Trianon, and my defender will be yourself, when your sister shall have spoken." A quarter of an hour after, they entered the carriage, and Fritz, driving two excellent horses at a rapid pace, conveyed them to Versailles.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE RIDE TO TRIANON.

All these journeys and all this explanation had taken time, so that it was nearly two o'clock in the morning when they left the Rue Saint Claude. It took an hour and a quarter to reach Versailles, and ten minutes to go from Versailles to Trianon, so that it was half-past three before the two men reached their destination. During the last part of the way, the dawn already spread its rosy tint on the green forests and the hillsides of Sèvres. As if a veil had been slowly withdrawn from their eyes, the fish-ponds of Ville d'Avray, and the more distant ones of Buc, were shining like mirrors. Then at last appeared the colonnades and roofs of Versailles, already red with the rays of a sun not yet visible. From time to time a window sparkled with the reflection of a ray of fire, which penetrated with its light the violet tint of the morning's mist. On coming to the end of the avenue that leads from Versailles to Trianon, Philippe stopped the carriage, and addressing his companion, who during the journey had preserved a gloomy silence, "Monsieur," said he, "we shall be obliged, I am afraid, to wait here some time. At Trianon the gates are not opened before five in the morning, and I am afraid that if we enter earlier our arrival will look suspicious to the watchmen and the guards."

Balsamo did not reply, but showed by a movement of the head that he acquiesced in the proposition.

"However, Monsieur," continued Philippe, "this delay will give me time to impart to you some reflections made during our journey hither."

Balsamo gave Philippe a look full of weariness and indifference. "As you please, Monsieur," said he; "speak, I am listening!"

"You told me, Monsieur," replied Philippe, "that during the night of the thirtieth of May you placed my sister in the house of Madame la Marquise de Savigny?"

"You were assured of it yourself, Monsieur," said Balsamo, "since you called to thank that lady."

"You then added that, as an attendant in the king's stables had accompanied you from the hôtel of the marchioness to our house, that is, to the Rue Coq-Héron, you had not been alone with her; I believed you on your word of honor."

"And you did well, Monsieur."

"But in recalling to myself the more recent circumstances, I am forced to think that a month since at Trianon, that night when you found a way to slip into the gardens, you must have entered her chamber."

"I never entered the chamber of your sister at Trianon, Monsieur."

"Listen, however! you see that before coming into the presence of Andrée, all things must be made clear."

"Clear up matters, Monsieur le Chevalier. I ask nothing better, and we have come here for that purpose."

"Well, on that night, — be careful in your answer, for what I say is true, and I have it from the lips of my sister, — on that night, I say, my sister retired early; you must then have surprised her in bed?"

Balsamo shook his head by way of denial.

"You deny it; take care!" said Philippe.

"I do not deny, Monsieur; you question me, I answer."

"Well, I shall go on questioning; continue therefore to reply."

Balsamo did not become angry, but on the contrary made a sign to Philippe to go on.

"When you ascended to the apartments of my sister," continued Philippe, becoming more and more excited, "when you surprised her, and magnetized her by your infernal power, Andrée was in bed; she was reading; she felt the approach of that torpor which your presence always brings upon her, and she lost consciousness. Now you say that you did nothing but question her; only, you add that you forgot when going away to awaken her; and yet," added Philippe, seizing Balsamo's arm, and pressing it convulsively, — "yet, when she came to her senses the next day, she was no longer in bed, but at the foot of her sofa, half-naked. Reply to this accusation, Monsieur, without evasion."

During this appeal, Balsamo, like a man waking up, drove away one by one the gloomy thoughts which obscured his mind. "Indeed, Monsieur," said he, "you need not have returned to this subject, thus seeking with me a lasting quarrel. I have come here out of condescension and from interest in you, — you seem to forget that. You are young, you are an officer, you are accustomed to speak out with your hand on the pommel of your sword. All this makes you reason falsely in serious circumstances. At my own house I did more than I ought to have done to convince you, and obtain from you a little peace. You begin again; take care, for if you fatigue me, I shall go to sleep in the midst of my troubles, in comparison with which yours are, I assure you, mere trifles; and when I sleep thus, Monsieur, woe to him who wakes me! I did not enter your sister's chamber; that is all I can tell you.

Your sister of her own free will, in which I confess my will had great share, came to me in the garden."

Philippe made a movement, but Balsamo stopped him. "I promised you proof," continued he; "you shall have it. Shall it be immediately? So be it. Let us enter Trianon instead of wasting time in useless talking. Do you prefer to wait? We will wait, then; but in silence and without excitement if you please." This said, with the air with which our readers are acquainted, Balsamo, the momentary gleam fading from his eyes, became absorbed in meditation.

Philippe uttered a low growl, like the ferocious beast which is preparing to bite; then changing suddenly his attitude and thought, "With this man," said he, "one must persuade or dominate by some superiority. I have just now no means of domination or persuasion; I must have patience." But as it was impossible for him to be patient in the presence of Balsamo, he jumped out of the carriage and began pacing the verdant alley in which the carriage had stopped. At the end of ten minutes, Philippe felt that it was impossible to wait any longer. He preferred to have the gate opened before the hour, at the risk of arousing suspicions. "Besides," he murmured, cherishing an idea which many times before had presented itself to his mind, — "besides, what suspicions can the porter entertain, if I say to him that anxiety about the health of my sister impelled me to go to Paris for a physician, and bring him here by sunrise?"

Adopting this idea, which by reason of his desire to put it into execution, had gradually lost its dangerous aspect, he ran to the carriage. "Yes, Monsieur," he said, "you are right; it is useless to wait longer, come, come!"

But it was only on a repetition of this request that

Balsamo threw off his cloak, fastened his great coat with burnished steel buttons, and left the carriage. Philippe took a path which led by a short cut to the gate of the park. "Let us walk quickly," he said to Balsamo. And he went on so rapidly that Balsamo could with difficulty keep up with him. The gate was opened, Philippe gave his explanation, and the two men passed in. When the gate was closed behind them, Philippe stopped once more. "Monsieur," he said, "one final word. We are at the end of our journey; I do not know what question you are about to ask my sister. Spare her at least the details of the horrible scene which took place during her sleep. Spare the purity of mind, though the purity of the body has been soiled."

"Monsieur," replied Balsamo, "observe carefully what I say; I never entered the park beyond the tall trees you see yonder, opposite the house in which your sister lives. I have consequently never gone into the chamber of Mademoiselle de Taverney, as I have already had the honor of telling you. As to the scene whose effect you dread upon the mind of Mademoiselle, your sister, this effect will be produced only upon you, because from this very moment I order Mademoiselle, your sister, to fall into a magnetic sleep."

Balsamo stopped, folded his arms, turned toward the pavilion where Andrée lived, and stood one moment motionless, with knitted brow and with the expression of all-powerful will upon his countenance.

"And stay," he said, letting his arms fall, "Mademoiselle Andrée must be sleeping at this moment."

Philippe's face expressed doubt.

"Ah, you do not believe me," said Balsamo. "Well, listen. To prove to you that I have no occasion to go in to her, I will command her, asleep as she is, to come to us

at the foot of the steps, at the very spot where I spoke to her at our last interview."

"Be it so," said Philippe; "when I see that I shall believe."

"Let us go into this walk, and wait behind the hedge."

Philippe and Balsamo repaired to the place designated. Balsamo extended his hand toward the apartment of Andrée; but he had scarcely done so, when a slight noise was heard in the adjoining hedge-row.

"A man," said Balsamo; "let us be careful."

"Where?" asked Philippe, searching for the person whom the count had spoken of.

"There, in the shrubbery on the left," said the latter.

"Ah, yes," said Philippe; "it is Gilbert, an old servant of ours."

"Have you anything to fear from this young man?"

"No, I think not; but no matter. Stop, Monsieur; if Gilbert has risen, others may have risen as well."

Meantime Gilbert had fled in fright; for seeing Philippe and Balsamo together, he comprehended instinctively that he was lost.

"Well, Monsieur, on what do you decide?"

"Monsieur," said Philippe, experiencing in spite of himself the sort of magnetic charm which this man diffused around him, "if your power is really so great as to lead Mademoiselle de Taverney to us, show it by some sign; but do not bring my sister to a place exposed like this, where the first-comer might hear your questions and her answers."

"You spoke in time," said Balsamo, seizing the arm of the young man and pointing out to him, at the window of the main corridor, Andrée, white and rigid, who had left her chamber, and obeying Balsamo's command was preparing to descend the stairs.

"Stop her; stop her!" said Philippe, frightened and astonished at the same time.

"Be it so," said Balsamo. The count extended his arm in the direction of Mademoiselle de Taverney, who immediately stopped. Then after stopping a moment, she turned right about and entered her chamber. Philippe hurried after her, Balsamo following him, and entered the room almost as soon as Andrée, and taking the young girl in his arms, he made her sit down. A few moments later Balsamo came in and shut the door behind him. But brief as the interval between these entrances, a third person had had time to slip in between the two men and enter Nicole's cabinet, where he hid himself, knowing that his life depended on this interview. This third person was Gilbert.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE REVELATION.

Balsamo closed the door behind him, and appeared on the threshold just as Philippe was looking at his sister with mingled terror and curiosity. "Are you ready, Chevalier?" he asked.

"Yes, Monsieur, yes," stammered Philippe, trembling.

"We can begin then, to question your sister?"

"If you please," said Philippe, trying to raise by force of respiration the weight which was crushing his breast.

"But before we begin, observe your sister."

"I see her, Monsieur."

"You really believe that she sleeps, do you not?"

"Yes."

"And that consequently she has no consciousness of what takes place here?"

Philippe made no reply, except by a gesture which expressed doubt. Balsamo then went to the fireplace and lighted a candle, which he passed before Andrée's eyes without causing her to move an eyelid.

"Yes, yes; she sleeps, it is evident," said Philippe; "but, good Heavens! what a strange sleep!"

"Well, I will question her," continued Balsamo; "or rather, since you have manifested fear lest I address her some indiscreet interrogation, question her yourself, Chevalier."

"But I have spoken to her; I touched her just now. She did not seem to hear me, she did not seem to feel my touch."

"I will put you in connection with her," and Balsamo placed Philippe's hand in that of Andrée.

Immediately the young girl smiled, and murmured, "Ah, it is you, brother?"

"You see," said Balsamo, "she recognizes you now."

"Yes; it is strange."

"Question her, she will answer."

"But if she does not remember when awake, how can she remember when asleep?"

"It is one of the mysteries of science," and Balsamo, sighing, sat down upon an easy chair in a corner.

Philippe sat motionless, his hand in Andrée's. How should he begin his questioning, the result of which would assure him of his dishonor, and reveal a criminal whom perhaps his vengeance could not reach? As for Andrée, she was in a state of calmness bordering on ecstasy, and her face expressed peace rather than any other feeling. Trembling all over, he obeyed nevertheless the expressive glance of Balsamo, which bade him begin. But in proportion as he contemplated his misfortune, as his face grew dark, that of Andrée was covered with a cloud, and it was she who began by saying, "Yes, you are right, brother; it is a great misfortune for the family."

Andrée interpreted thus the thought which she read in her brother's mind. Philippe was not expecting this beginning; he started, "What misfortune?" he asked, without considering his answer.

"Ah, you know well, brother."

"Force her to speak, Monsieur; she will speak."

"How can I force her?"

"Will her to speak, that is all."

Philippe looked at his sister, forming a wish in his mind. Andrée blushed.

"Oh!" said the young girl, "how bad it is of you, Philippe, to think that Andrée has deceived you."

"You love no one, then?"

"No one."

"Then it is not an accomplice, it is a criminal I must punish!"

"I do not understand you, brother."

Philippe looked at the count as if to ask advice.

"Press her," said Balsamo.

"Press her?"

"Yes, question her freely."

"Without respect for the modesty of this child?"

"Oh, do not be alarmed; on awaking she will remember nothing of it."

"But can she answer my questions?"

"Do you see clearly?" Balsamo asked Andrée.

Andrée started at the sound of this voice; she turned her lustreless eyes toward Balsamo. "Not so clearly as if you questioned me; but still I see."

"Well," Philippe asked, "if you see, sister, give me an account in detail of that night when you fainted away."

"Do you not begin with the night of the thirtieth of May, Monsieur? Your suspicions date from that night, I think. The time has come to clear up everything at once."

"No, Monsieur," replied Philippe; "it is useless, and now I trust your word. He who wields a power like yours, does not use it for the attainment of any common object. Sister," repeated Philippe, "tell me everything that happened on that night of your swoon."

"I do not remember," said Andrée.

"You hear, Monsieur le Comte?"

"She must remember; she must speak. Order her to."

"But if she was asleep?"

"The mind was awake." Then he arose, held out his hand to Andrée, and with a knitting of the brows which indicated a redoubling of will and action, "Remember," he said; "I will it."

"I remember," said Andrée.

"Oh!" said Philippe, wiping his forehead.

"What do you wish to know?"

"Everything."

"From what moment?"

"From the moment when you retired to bed."

"Do you see yourself?" said Balsamo.

"Yes, I see myself; I hold in my hand the glass prepared by Nicole — Oh, my God!"

"What? what is it?"

"Oh, the wretch!"

"Speak, sister; speak!"

"This glass contains a drink which has been drugged; if I drink it, I am lost."

"A drink which has been drugged!" cried Philippe; "for what object?"

"Wait! wait!"

"First, about the drink."

"I was about to raise it to my lips; but — at that moment —"

"Well?"

"The count called me."

"What count?"

"He," said Andrée, pointing to Balsamo.

"And then?"

"Then I put down the glass and went to sleep."

"What next? what next?" asked Philippe.

"I arose and joined him."

"Where was the count?"

"Under the lime-trees opposite my window."

"And the count never entered your room, sister?"

"Never."

A glance from Balsamo toward Philippe said clearly, "You see whether I deceive you, Monsieur?"

"And you say you went to join the count?"

"Yes; I obey him when he calls me."

"What did the count want of you?"

Andrée hesitated.

"Say, say!" cried Balsamo; "I will not listen," and he fell back into his chair, burying his head in his hands as if to prevent the sound of Andrée's words from reaching him.

"Speak! What did the count want?" repeated Philippe.

"He wished to seek intelligence from me—" She again stopped; one would have said that she was afraid of breaking the count's heart.

"Go on, sister, go on."

"Of a person who had escaped from his house, and—" Andrée lowered her voice,—"and who has since died." Softly as Andrée had pronounced these words Balsamo heard or divined them, for he uttered a deep groan. Philippe stopped; there was a moment's silence.

"Continue, continue," said Balsamo; "your brother wishes to know everything, Mademoiselle; your brother must know all. After this man had received the information he desired, what did he do?"

"He fled," said Andrée.

"Leaving you in the garden?" asked Philippe.

"Yes."

"What did you do then?"

"As he retreated from me, since the strength which sustained me went with him, I fell."

"In a swoon?"

"No; still a sleep, but a leaden sleep."

"Can you remember what happened to you during that sleep?"

"I will try."

"Well, what happened? Speak!"

"A man came out from a thicket, took me in his arms, and carried me —"

"Where?"

"Here into my chamber."

"Ah! — and this man, do you see him?"

"Stay — yes — yes — Oh!" continued Andrée, with an expression of disgust and uneasiness; "oh, it is again that little Gilbert!"

"Gilbert?"

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"He put me down on the sofa."

"Afterward?"

"Wait."

"See! see!" said Balsamo; "I will that you see."

"He listens; he goes into the other chamber; he draws back as if in fear; he enters Nicole's cabinet — My God! my God!"

"What?"

"A man follows him; and I, — I, who cannot rise, defend myself, or cry out; I, who sleep —"

"Who is this man?"

"Brother, brother!" and Andrée's countenance expressed the profoundest grief.

"Tell who this man is," commanded Balsamo; "I will it!"

"The king!" murmured Andrée; "it is the king!"

Philippe shuddered.

"Ah!" muttered Balsamo, "I suspected it."

"He approaches me," continued Andrée; "he speaks to me, he takes me in his arms, he kisses me. Oh, brother, brother!"

Great tears came into Philippe's eyes, while his hand grasped the handle of the sword given him by Balsamo.

"Speak! speak!" continued the count, in a tone more and more imperative.

"Oh, what happiness! he is perplexed; he stops; he looks at me; he is afraid; he flies; Andrée is saved!"

Philippe drank in, breathless, every word that issued from Andrée's lips. "Saved! Andrée is saved!" he repeated mechanically.

"Wait, brother, wait!" and the young girl sought the arm of her brother as if to support herself.

"Afterward?" asked Philippe.

"I had forgotten."

"What?"

"There, there, in Nicole's cabinet, a knife in his hand —"

"A knife in his hand?"

"I see him; he is pale as death."

"Who?"

"Gilbert."

Philippe held his breath.

"He follows the king," continued Andrée; "he closes the door after him; he puts his foot upon the candle which is burning the carpet; he comes toward me. Oh!" The young girl raised herself in the arms of her brother. Every muscle in her body grew stiff, almost to breaking.

"Oh, the villain!" said she, at last; and she fell back powerless.

"My God!" said Philippe, not daring to interrupt her.

"It is he; it is he!" murmured the young girl. Then

raising herself up to speak in her brother's ear, with flashing eye and trembling voice, "You will kill him, will you not, Philippe?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the young man, jumping up, and upsetting a small table behind him covered with china. The china was broken into pieces. With the noise of this fall was mingled a dull sound and a sudden shaking of the partitions; then a cry from Andrée, which was heard above all.

"What is that?" said Balsamo. "A door was opened."

"Was any one listening?" cried Philippe, grasping his sword.

"It was he," said Andrée, — "it was he again."

"But who is he?"

"Gilbert, Gilbert, still! Ah, you will kill him, Philippe, you will kill him?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes!" cried the young man; and he rushed to the antechamber sword in hand, while Andrée fell back on the sofa. Balsamo rushed after the young man, and held him by the arm.

"Take care, Monsieur!" said he, "that which is secret would become public; it is daylight, and the echo of royal houses is loud."

"Oh, Gilbert, Gilbert!" murmured Philippe; "and he was hidden there. He heard us; I could kill him. Oh, the accursed villain!"

"Yes, but silence! You can find this young man another time; your sister needs you now, Monsieur. You see she begins to be fatigued by so much emotion."

"Oh, yes; I understand her suffering by my own; this misfortune is so terrible, so irreparable! Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur, it will kill me!"

"On the contrary, you will live for her, Chevalier; for she needs you, having only you. Love her, pity her, take

care of her! And now," continued he, after a moment's silence, "have you further need of me?"

"No, Monsieur. Pardon me my suspicions, my insults; and yet all the injury comes from you, Monsieur."

"I do not excuse myself, Chevalier; but do you forget what your sister said?"

"What did she say? My mind wanders."

"If I had not come, she would have taken the draught prepared by Nicole, and then it would have been the king. Would the misfortune have been less?"

"No, Monsieur, it would have been still the same; and I see clearly that we were doomed. Awake my sister, Monsieur."

"But she will see me; she will, perhaps, understand what has been going on. It is better that I awake her, as I put her to sleep, — at a distance."

"Thanks, thanks!"

"Then, adieu, Monsieur."

"One word more, Count. You are a man of honor?"

"Oh, the secret you mean?"

"Count —"

"A needless charge, Monsieur; in the first place, because I am a man of honor; then, having decided to have nothing more to do with men, I shall forget men and their secrets. At all times call upon me, if I can be of use to you. But, no, no, I am no longer good for anything; I am of no more use upon the earth. Adieu, Monsieur, adieu!" and bowing to Philippe, Balsamo looked once more at Andrée, whose head was leaning back with every appearance of grief and lassitude. "O Science!" he murmured, "how many victims for a result without value!" and he disappeared.

As he retreated Andrée revived. She raised her head, heavy as if it had been made of lead, and looking at her

brother with wondering eyes, "Oh, Philippe!" she murmured, "what has happened?"

Philippe restrained the sob which was choking him, and smiling heroically, "Nothing, sister!" said he.

"And yet I seem to have been mad, and to have dreamed."

"Dreamed? and what have you dreamed, my dear and good Andrée?"

"Oh, Doctor Louis, Doctor Louis, brother!"

"Andrée," cried Philippe, pressing her hand, "Andrée, you are pure as the light of day; but everything accuses you, everything is against you. A terrible secret is imposed upon us two. I will go and find Doctor Louis, and ask him to say to Madame la Dauphine that you are attacked by an unconquerable homesickness, which a stay at Taverney alone can cure; and then we will depart either for Taverney or for some other part of the world. Then both, in seclusion there, loving, consoling each other —"

"Yet, brother," said Andrée, "if I am as pure as you say —"

"Dear Andrée, I will explain it all to you; meantime, prepare for departure."

"But my father?"

"Father," said Philippe, with a serious air, "father, — that is my concern; I will prepare him."

"He will accompany us, then?"

"Father? oh, impossible, impossible! We two, Andrée, — we two alone, I say."

"Oh, how you frighten me, dear! how you alarm me, brother! how I suffer, Philippe!"

"God is everywhere, Andrée," said the young man; "courage, then! I will seek the doctor. What makes you ill, Andrée, is sorrow at leaving Taverney, — sorrow which

you conceal for the sake of Madame la Dauphine. Come, come, be brave, sister, the honor of both of us is at stake!" and Philippe embraced his sister hastily, for he was choking with emotion. Then he picked up his sword, which he had dropped, sheathed it with trembling hand, and rushed out on to the stairs. A quarter of an hour after he knocked at Doctor Louis's door, who, while the court was at Trianon, lived at Versailles.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LITTLE GARDEN OF DOCTOR LOUIS.

Doctor Louis, at whose door we have left Philippe, was walking in a little garden surrounded by four high walls, which formed a part of the dependencies of an old Ursuline convent, and had been converted into a storehouse for Messieurs the dragoons of the king's household.

Doctor Louis read, while walking, the proofs of a new work he was about to have printed, and stooped from time to time to pull from the path in which he was walking, or from the parterre on either side, the weeds which offended his instinct of symmetry and order. A single servant, rather surly, like every domestic of an industrious man who does not like to be disturbed, took the whole care of the doctor's house. In answer to Philippe's resounding knock, she approached the door and half opened it. But the young man, instead of parleying with the servant, pushed the door open and went in. Once master of the passage he saw the garden and in it the doctor. Then, without paying any attention to the speeches and outcries of the vigilant guardian, he rushed into the garden. At the sound of his steps the doctor looked up. "Ah, ah!" he said, "is it you?"

"Pardon me, Doctor, for having forced your door and disturbed your solitude; but the moment you had foreseen has arrived; I need you, and I come to implore your assistance."

"I have promised you, Monsieur," said the doctor; "and I promise it now."

Philippe bowed, too much affected to begin the conversation himself. Doctor Louis understood his hesitation. "How is the invalid?" he asked, anxious on account of Philippe's paleness, and fearing some catastrophe as a crisis of this drama.

"Very well, thank God, Doctor; and my sister is so worthy and so honest a girl that really God would not be just to send her suffering and danger."

The doctor looked at Philippe as if to question him; his words seemed to him a continuation of the denials of the evening before.

"Then," said he, "she was the victim of some surprise, or some plot."

"Yes, Doctor, victim of an unheard of surprise, — victim of an infamous plot."

The doctor clasped his hands, and lifted his eyes toward heaven. "Alas!" said he, "we live, in this respect, in horrible times; and I think there is pressing need of physicians of nations, as there have been so long physicians of individuals."

"Yes," said Philippe, "yes, let them come; no one will be more glad to see them than I; meanwhile —" And Philippe made a threatening gesture.

"Ah!" said the doctor, "you are, I see, Monsieur, one of those who make the reparation of crime consist in violence and murder."

"Yes, Doctor," Philippe calmly replied, "yes, I am one of those."

"A duel," sighed the doctor, — "a duel, which will not restore your sister's honor, even if you kill the criminal, and which will plunge her in despair if you are killed. Ah, Monsieur, I thought that you had a sound mind and

an intelligent heart; I thought I had heard you express the desire that everything relating to this affair should be kept secret."

Philippe laid his hand upon the doctor's arm. "Monsieur," said he, "you are strangely mistaken in me; I have a steadfast purpose which springs from deep conviction and a clear conscience. I wish to do justly, not to do myself justice; I wish, not to expose my sister to abandonment and death by getting myself killed, but to avenge her by killing the scoundrel."

"You will kill him, — you, a gentleman? You will commit a murder?"

"Monsieur, if I had seen him ten minutes before the crime, stealing like a thief into that chamber, into which, on account of his low station, he had no right to put his foot, and had then killed him, every one would have said that I had done well; why, then, should I spare him now? Has crime made him sacred?"

"So this bitter purpose is determined upon in your mind, fixed in your heart?"

"Fixed, determined upon! I shall find him some time, however carefully he hides; and then, I tell you, Monsieur, without pity, without remorse, I will kill him like a dog!"

"Then," said Doctor Louis, "you will commit a crime equal to his, — a more odious crime, perhaps; for one never knows whether an imprudent word, or the coquettish look of a woman may not have urged on the desire and lust of the man. Kill him! when you have other reparation, — when a marriage —"

Philippe looked up. "Are you unaware, Monsieur, that the family of Taverney-Maison-Rouge dates from the Crusades, and that my sister is as noble as an infanta or an archduchess?"

"Yes, I understand; and the culprit, he is not; he is a wretch, a clodhopper, as you high-bred men say. Yes, yes," he continued, with a bitter smile, "yes, it is true; God has made men of a certain inferior clay to be killed by other men of finer clay; oh, yes! you are right, — kill, Monsieur, kill!" And the doctor turned his back on Philippe and began to pull up here and there the weeds in his garden.

Philippe folded his arms. "Doctor, listen to me," he said; "it is not a question of a seducer to whom a coquette has given more or less encouragement; it is not a question of a man provoked, as you say, — we speak of a miserable fellow brought up by us, and who, after having eaten the bread of pity, in the night, taking advantage of an artificial sleep, of a swoon, of death, so to speak, has basely and treacherously profaned the holiest and purest of women, whom in the light of day he did not dare look in the face. Before a tribunal this guilty man would certainly be doomed to death; well, I will judge him as impartially as a tribunal, and I will kill him. Now, Doctor, will you, whom I have thought so generous and so noble, — will you make me purchase this service, or impose on me a condition? In rendering it to me, will you do like those who seek to oblige, and to satisfy themselves at the same time? If it is so, Doctor, you are not that wise man I have admired; you are only an ordinary man, and in spite of the disdain which you showed me just now, I am superior to you, — I, who have confided to you, without reservation, my whole secret."

"You say," replied the doctor, thoughtfully, "that the guilty man has fled?"

"Yes, Doctor; no doubt he foresaw that the affair would become known; he heard that he was accused, and immediately took flight."

"Good! Now what do you desire, Monsieur," asked the doctor.

"Your assistance in removing my sister from Versailles, to bury in a thicker and more silent darkness the terrible secret that would dishonor us if it should become known."

"I will ask you but one question."

Philippe was indignant.

"Listen to me," continued the doctor, with a gesture which commanded calmness. "A Christian philosopher, of whom you have just made a confessor, is obliged to impose upon you a condition, not with reference to the service rendered, but in pursuance of the law of conscience. Humanity is a duty, Monsieur, not a virtue. You speak to me of killing a man; I must prevent it, as I would have prevented by all the means in my power, by violence even, the accomplishment of the crime committed upon your sister. Therefore, Monsieur, I adjure you, make me an oath."

"Oh, never! never!"

"You will do it," cried Doctor Louis, vehemently, — "you will do it, man of blood; recognize everywhere the hand of God, and do not assume to direct its stroke. The culprit, you say, was within your reach?"

"Yes, Doctor; by opening a door, if I could have divined that he was there, I should have been face to face with him."

"Well, he has fled, he trembles, his punishment has begun. Ah, you smile; what God does appears to you feeble! remorse seems insufficient! Wait, wait, then! You will stay with your sister, and you will promise me never to pursue the criminal. If you meet him, that is, if God delivers him up to you — well, I am also a man! — in that case you will see!"

"Nonsense, Monsieur; will he not always fly from me?"

"Who knows? The assassin flies, the assassin seeks refuge, the assassin fears the scaffold; and yet as if he were magnetized, the sword of justice draws this criminal to itself, and he finally falls under the hand of the executioner. Besides, it is a question now of giving up all that you have undertaken so painfully to do? It is for the world in which you live and to whom you cannot explain the innocence of your sister, it is for all these curious idlers that you kill a man; and you would feed their curiosity twice, — by the avowal of the attempt in the first place, afterward by the scandal of the punishment. No, no, believe me; keep silence, bury this misfortune."

"Oh, who will know when I shall have killed this villain, that it was on my sister's account?"

"You would have to give a reason for this murder."

"Well, Doctor, I will obey; I will not pursue the criminal. But God will be just; oh, yes! God uses impunity as a bait; God will again show me the criminal."

"In that case it will be God who has condemned him. Give me your hand, Monsieur."

"There it is."

"What must I do for Mademoiselle de Taverney? Tell me."

"You must, dear Doctor, find a pretext with Madame la Dauphine for taking her away for a time, — longing for the country, fresh air — "

"That is easy."

"Yes; that is your affair, and I rely upon you. I will then take my sister to some corner of France, Taverney for example, far from all eyes, from all suspicion."

"No, no, Monsieur, that would be impossible. The poor child needs constant care and solace; she will need all the

aid of science. Let me then find for her near here, in a village I know of, a retreat a hundred times more secluded, a hundred times more safe than the wild country into which you would take her."

"Oh, Doctor, you think so?"

"Yes, I have reason to think so. Suspicion always moves from the centre outward like those circles caused by a stone thrown into the water; the stone however does not move, and when the undulations are obliterated no one sees the cause of them, buried as it is under the depths of the water."

"Then, Doctor, go to work."

"From to-day, Monsieur?"

"Apprise Madame la Dauphine."

"This very morning."

"And for the rest?"

"In twenty-four hours, you shall have my answer."

"Oh, thanks, Doctor; you are for me a god!"

"Well, young man, now that everything is arranged between us, accomplish your mission; return to your sister, console her, protect her."

"Adieu, Doctor, adieu!"

The doctor, after having watched Philippe until he was out of sight, returned to his walk, his proofs, and the weeding of his little garden.

CHAPTER L.

FATHER AND SON.

When Philippe returned to his sister he found her very much agitated, very uneasy. "My dear," said she, "I have been thinking while you were away of all that has happened to me for some time past. It is an abyss which will swallow up the little reason that remains to me. Well, you have seen Doctor Louis?"

"I have just been to his house, Andrée."

"That man has brought a terrible accusation against me; is it just?"

"He was not mistaken, sister."

Andrée grew pale, and her small and delicate hands contracted nervously.

"The name," said she, then, — "the name of the wretch who ruined me?"

"My sister, you must remain ignorant of it forever."

"Oh, Philippe, you do not speak the truth; Philippe, you are false to your own conscience. This name, I must know it; so that feeble as I am, and having nothing for myself but prayer, I may by prayer direct against the criminal all the anger of God. The name of this man, Philippe?"

"Let us never speak of it, sister."

Andrée seized his hand, and looked him in the face. "Oh!" said she, "this is what you reply to me, — you who have a sword by your side!"

Philippe grew pale at this exhibition of anger, and restraining his own fury, "Andrée," he said, "I cannot tell

you what I do not know myself. Secrecy is ordered me by the destiny which overwhelms us; this secret, exposure of which would compromise the honor of our family, a last favor of God renders inviolable to all."

"Except for one man, Philippe,— for a man who laughs, for a man who defies us! — oh, my God! for a man who laughs infernally at us, perhaps, in his dark retreat."

Philippe wrung his hands, looked upward, and answered nothing.

"This man," cried Andrée, with increasing anger and indignation, "I know him, perhaps, — in short, Philippe, permit me to present him to you. I have already described his strange influence over me; I think I sent you to him — "

"That man is innocent; I have seen him; I have proof. So do not seek farther, Andrée, seek no farther."

"Philippe, let us ascend a little higher than this man, will you? Let us go to the first ranks of the powerful men of this kingdom. Let us go even to the king!"

Philippe encircled with his arms this poor child, sublime in her ignorance and in her indignation, "There," he said, "all those whom you have mentioned while awake, you have named in your sleep; all these whom you accuse with the ferocity of virtue you have vindicated in your magnetic sleep, when you saw, so to speak, the crime committed."

"Did I name the guilty one?" she said, with flashing eyes.

"No," Philippe replied, "no. Ask no more, follow my example, — submit to destiny. The misfortune is irreparable; it is doubled for you by the impunity of the criminal; but hope, hope! God is above all; God reserves for those who are oppressed a savage joy which is called vengeance."

"Vengeance!" she murmured, frightened at the terrible emphasis with which Philippe pronounced this word.

"Meantime rest, sister, from all the troubles, all the shame, which my mad curiosity has caused you. If I had known! oh, if I had known!" And he hid his face in his hands in fearful despair. Then suddenly looking up, "What have I to complain of?" said he, with a smile. "My sister is pure, she loves me; she has never betrayed confidence nor friendship. My sister is young like myself, kind like myself; we will live together, we will grow old together. Together we shall be stronger than the whole world!"

In proportion as the young man spoke in a manner to console Andrée, she became gloomy; she bent down her pale face; she took the attitude and settled look of dull despair, which Philippe had just shaken off so courageously. "You never speak but of us two!" she said, looking steadily, with her searching blue eyes upon her brother's changing countenance.

"Of whom would you have me speak, Andrée?" said the young man, meeting her look.

"But — we have a father; how will he treat his daughter?"

"I told you yesterday," Philippe coldly replied, "to forget all trouble, all fear, — to dismiss, as the wind dispels the morning mist, every memory and every affection except mine. Indeed, my dear Andrée, nobody in the world loves you but myself; I am loved only by you. Poor abandoned orphans, why should we bear the yoke of gratitude or relationship? Have we received kindness? Have we enjoyed the protection of a father? Oh!" he added, with a bitter smile, "you know my very thoughts, you know the state of my heart. If you must love him you speak of, I will say, 'Love him!' I am silent. Andrée, forbear."

"Then, brother, I must believe —"

"Sister, in great misfortunes man involuntarily hears those words so little understood in childhood, 'Fear God!' Oh, yes! God has cruelly recalled it to our memory! 'Respect thy father' — Oh, my sister, the strongest proof of respect you could give your father would be to blot him from your memory."

"It is true —" murmured Andrée, gloomily, leaning back in her chair.

"My dear, let us not waste time in useless words. Collect all your effects; Doctor Louis will see Madame la Dauphine, and inform her of your departure. The causes he will allege, you know, — the need of change of air, unaccountable suffering. Be all ready, I say, for departure."

Andrée arose. "The furniture?" she said.

"Oh, no, — linen, clothes, jewels."

Andrée obeyed. She set in order in the first place the boxes from the closet, the clothes from the wardrobe where Gilbert had hidden; then she took some jewel-cases which she was about to put in the principal box.

"What is that?" said Philippe.

"It is the casket of jewels sent me by the king, for my representation at Trianon."

Philippe turned pale on seeing the richness of the present.

"With only these jewels," said Andrée, "we can live respectably anywhere. I have heard that the pearls alone are worth one hundred thousand francs."

Philippe closed the casket. "They are indeed very valuable," he said. And taking the casket from Andrée's hands, "I think there are some other jewels, sister."

"Oh, my dear, they are not worthy to be compared with these; they adorned, however, the toilet of our mother fifteen years ago. The watch, the bracelets, the earrings, are enriched with brilliants. There is also the

portrait. Father wished to sell them all, because, he said, they were no longer fashionable."

"This is, however, all that remains to us," said Philippe, "our only resource. My sister, we will melt the gold articles; we will sell the jewels of the portrait. We shall thus have twenty thousand francs, which is a sufficient sum for the unhappy."

"But — this case of pearls is mine," said Andrée.

"Never touch those pearls, Andrée; they will burn you. Each one of these pearls is of a strange nature, sister; they stain the foreheads which they touch."

Andrée shuddered.

"I will keep this case, sister, to return it to whom it belongs. I tell you it is not our property, and we have no wish to claim it, have we?"

"As you please, brother," Andrée replied, with a shudder of shame.

"Dear sister, dress yourself for the last time to go to see Madame la Dauphine; be very calm, very respectful, and much affected at leaving so noble a protectress."

"Oh, yes! much affected," murmured Andrée, with emotion; "it is a great grief in my misfortune."

"I am going to Paris, sister, and I will return to-night; as soon as I arrive I will take you away. Pay all that you owe here."

"Nothing, nothing; I had Nicole, she has fled, — ah, I forgot the little Gilbert."

Philippe started, his eyes kindled. "You owe Gilbert?" he cried.

"Yes," said Andrée, naturally, "he has furnished me with flowers through the season. But, as you told me yourself, I have been at times unjust and harsh toward this fellow, who was after all polite. I will recompense him differently."

"Do not seek Gilbert," said Philippe.

"Why not? He must be in the garden; I will send for him then."

"No, no; you will lose precious time. I, on the contrary, shall meet him; I will speak to him; I will pay him."

"Very well, then, that will do."

"Yes, adieu until this evening;" and he kissed the hand of the young girl, who threw herself into his arms. He restrained even the beating of his heart in this gentle embrace.

Without delay Philippe departed for Paris, where the carriage set him down before the door of the little hôtel in the Rue Coq-Héron. Philippe knew that he should find his father there. The old man, since his strange rupture with Richelieu, had not found life tolerable at Versailles, and he sought, like all minds of exuberant activity, to beguile mental torpor by the excitement of change of place.

Now the baron, when Philippe rang at the gate of the court-yard, was pacing, with terrible oaths, the little garden of the hôtel and the court adjoining it. He started at the sound of the bell, and answered it himself. As he expected no one, this unforeseen visit gave him hope; the unhappy man in his fall caught at every branch. He therefore received Philippe with a feeling of spite and vague curiosity. But he had no sooner glanced at the face of his visitor than that dull pallor, those rigid lines, and that contracted mouth froze the reservoir of questions which he was prepared to open.

"You?" he said only, "and by what chance?"

"I shall have the honor of explaining to you, Monsieur," said Philippe.

"Good! is it serious?"

"Very serious; yes, Monsieur."

"This boy always has ceremonious ways that disturb me. Is it a misfortune, or is it good fortune, which you bring?"

"It is a misfortune!" Philippe said gravely. The baron staggered. "We are quite alone?" asked Philippe.

"Why, yes."

"Would you like to go into the house, Monsieur?"

"Why not in the open air under these trees?"

"Because there are some things which are not spoken of under the open sky."

The baron looked at his son, obeyed his silent gesture, and affecting to be unmoved, even smiling, he followed him into the hall, the door of which Philippe had already opened. When the doors were carefully closed, Philippe waited for a sign from his father to begin the conversation; and the baron being seated comfortably in the best chair in the salon, —

"Monsieur," said Philippe, "my sister and I intend to take leave of you."

"What!" said the baron, very much surprised, "you — you go away! And the service?"

"There is no more service for me. You know the promises made by the king have not been realized, — fortunately."

"I do not see any 'fortunately' about it."

"Monsieur — "

"Explain it to me; how can you be fortunate in not being colonel of a fine regiment? You carry your philosophy to extremes."

"I carry it so far as not to prefer dishonor to prosperity, that is all. But we will not enter upon considerations of this kind, if you please, Monsieur — "

"We will, *pardieu!*"

"I entreat you —" replied Philippe, with a firmness which signified, "I will not!"

The baron frowned. "And your sister, does she also forget her duties, — her service with Madame?"

"There are some duties which she must subordinate to others, Monsieur."

"Of what nature, Monsieur?"

"Of tho most imperious necessity."

The baron rose. "It is a foolish sort of people," he growled, "they who make enigmas."

"Is all this that I am saying really an enigma to you?"

"Absolutely!" replied the baron, with a coolness that astonished Philippe.

"I will explain, then. My sister goes away because she is obliged to fly to avoid dishonor!"

The baron burst out laughing. "Oh, what model children I have!" he cried. "The son abandons the hope of a regiment because he fears dishonor; the daughter gives up a sure position because she is afraid of dishonor. Really, I have returned to the times of Brutus and Lucretia! In my time (a miserable time, doubtless, and not equal to these fine days of philosophy) when a man saw dishonor approaching in the distance; and when he, like you, carried a sword at his side; and when, like you, he had taken lessons from two masters and three provost-marshals, — he ran the first dishonor through with the point of his sword."

Philippe shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, it is hardly the thing to say to a philanthropist who does not like to see blood flow; but then, officers are not exactly born to be philanthropists."

"Monsieur, I know as well as you the necessities imposed by a point of honor; but the shedding of blood will not redeem —"

"Phrases, phrases of a philosopher!" said the old man, angry almost to the point of becoming majestic. "I think I was going to say of a coward!"

"You did well not to say so," replied Philippe, pale and trembling.

The baron met proudly the implacable and threatening look of his son. "I said," he replied, — "and my logic is not so bad as they would make me believe, — I said that all dishonor in this world comes, not from an action, but from the tattling about it. Ah, it is thus: If you are criminal before the deaf, the blind, the dumb, are you dishonored? You will answer me by that stupid line, 'The crime makes the disgrace, not the scaffold.' That is very well to say to children or women, but to a man, *mordieu!* we speak a different language. Now I imagine that I have created a man. So, then, if the blind man has seen anything, if the deaf man has heard, if the dumb man has spoken, you seize your sword, and you tear out the eyes of one, and the tympanum of another, and you cut out the tongue of the third, — this is how an attack of dishonor is met by a gentleman of the name of Taverney-Maison-Rouge!"

"A gentleman of that name, Monsieur, always knows that among all obligations the first is that of refusing to commit a dishonorable action; that is the reason why I will not reply to your arguments. But it sometimes happens that opprobrium springs from an inevitable misfortune; this is the case with my sister and myself."

"I come now to your sister. If, according to my system, man ought never to fly from a thing which he can fight against and conquer, woman ought also to stand firm. Of what use is virtue, Monsieur Philosopher, except to repel the attacks of vice? Where is the triumph of this same virtue, if not in the defeat of vice?" and Taverney began to laugh. "Mademoiselle de Taverney has

been much frightened, has she not? She feels very weak, then? If so — "

Philippe suddenly drew nearer. "Monsieur," he said, "Mademoiselle de Taverney has not been weak; she was overcome by force! She has fallen helpless into a trap."

"Into a trap?"

"Yes. Keep, I beg, a little of that fervor which animated you just now to blast those scoundrels who have basely plotted the ruin of this spotless honor."

"I do not understand — "

"You shall understand. A villain, I tell you, has introduced some one into the chamber of Mademoiselle de Taverney."

The baron grew pale.

"A villain," continued Philippe, "has resolved that the name of Taverney — mine, yours, Monsieur — should be soiled by an indelible stain. Well! where is your young man's sword to shed a little blood? Is it worth the trouble?"

"Monsieur Philippe — "

"Ah, fear nothing; I accuse no one, I know no one. The crime was plotted in the dark, accomplished in the dark; the result shall disappear in the dark, I am determined! — I who understand in my own way the glory of my house."

"But how do you know?" cried the baron, aroused from his stupor by the allurement of an infamous ambition, of an ignoble hope; "what indications have you?"

"It is a question which no one who may see my sister, your daughter, in a few months will ask, Monsieur le Baron!"

"But, then, Philippe," cried the old man, with eyes full of joy, "in that case the fortune and glory of our house have not vanished; in that case we shall triumph!"

"In that case, you are really the man I believed you,"

said Philippe, with supreme disgust; "you have betrayed yourself, and you have failed in intelligence before a judge, after failing in heart before your son."

"Insolent!"

"Enough!" replied Philippe. "Tremble lest you awaken, in speaking so loud, the spirit, alas! too insensible, of my mother, who, if she had lived, would have watched over her daughter."

The baron lowered his eyes before the dazzling brightness which flashed from the eyes of his son. "My daughter," he continued after a moment, "shall not leave me without my consent."

"My sister will never see you again, father."

"Has she said so?"

"She sends me to inform you."

The baron wiped, with a trembling hand, his white and moist lips. "Be it so," he said. Then, shrugging his shoulders, "I have been unfortunate in my children," he cried, —"a fool and a brute."

Philippe made no reply. "Good, good!" continued Taverney; "I have no further need of you; go — if the thesis is recited."

"I had still two things more to say to you, Monsieur."

"Speak."

"The first is this; the king has given you a casket of pearls —"

"To your sister, Monsieur."

"To you, Monsieur. Besides, it matters little; my sister never wears such jewels. Mademoiselle de Taverney is not a prostitute; she begs you to return the casket to the one who gave it, or if you fear to disoblige his Majesty, who has done so much for our family, to keep it yourself."

Philippe handed the case to his father. The latter took

it, opened it, looked at the pearls, and threw it upon a chiffonniere. "What next?" he said.

"Then, Monsieur, as we are not rich; since you have pledged, or spent even, the property of our mother, for which I will not reproach you — God forbid — "

"You had better not," said the baron, grinding his teeth.

"But still, as we have only Taverney left of this moderate inheritance, we beg you to choose between Taverney and this little hôtel in which we are. Live in one, we will retire to the other."

The baron rumpled his lace frill with a rage which was betrayed only by the movement of his fingers, the moisture of his forehead, and the trembling of his lips. Philippe did not even notice it. He had turned away his head. "I prefer Taverney," said the baron.

"Then we will keep the hôtel."

"As you like."

"When will you set out?"

"This very evening; no, immediately."

Philippe bowed.

"At Taverney," continued the baron, "one may be a king with three thousand francs' income. I shall be twice king." He stretched his hand toward the chiffonniere to take the casket, which he put in his pocket. Then he went toward the door. Suddenly retracing his steps, he said, with a wicked smile, "Philippe, I permit you to sign our name to the first treatise of philosophy which you publish. As for Andrée — for her first work — advise her to call it Louis or Louise; it is a name which brings luck;" and he left with a sneer. Philippe, with bloodshot eye, head on fire, pressed the hilt of his sword, murmuring, "My God! give me patience, grant me *forgetfulness*!"

CHAPTER LI.

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE.

AFTER having copied with scrupulous care some pages of his "Réveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire," Rousseau had finished a frugal breakfast. Although a retreat had been offered him in the delicious gardens of Ermenonville, Rousseau, hesitating to submit to the slavery of the great, as he said in his mania of misanthropy, still lived in this little lodging of the Rue Plastrière with which we are acquainted.

On her part, Thérèse, having put in order her little house, had just taken her basket to go to market. It was nine o'clock in the morning. The housekeeper, according to her custom, came to ask Rousseau what he would like for dinner that day. Rousseau emerged from his revery, slowly raised his head, and looked at Thérèse like a man half-awake.

"Whatever you wish," he said, "provided there are cherries and flowers."

"We will see, — if all this is not too dear."

"Of course," said Rousseau.

"For indeed," continued Thérèse, "I do not know whether what you do is worth anything; but it seems to me that they do not pay you as formerly."

"You are mistaken, Thérèse. They pay me the same; but I get tired and work less, and then my bookseller is in arrears with me to the extent of half a volume."

"You will see that this one will make you bankrupt again."

"I hope not; he is an honest man."

"An honest man, an honest man! When you have said that, you think you have said all."

"I have said much, at least," replied Rousseau, smiling; "for I cannot say it of everybody."

"It is not surprising; you are so cross."

"Thérèse, we are wandering from the question."

"Yes; you want your cherries, gourmand! you want your flowers, sybarite!"

"What would you have, my good housewife?" replied Rousseau, with the patience of an angel; "my heart and my head are so bad that not being able to go out, I take delight at least in the sight of what God spreads over the country with bountiful hand."

Indeed, Rousseau was pale and exhausted, and his listless hands turned over the leaves his eyes did not read.

Thérèse shook her head. "Very well, very well," said she; "I am going out for an hour; remember that I shall put the key under the mat, and that if you need —"

"Oh, I shall not go out," said Rousseau.

"I know very well that you will not go out, since you cannot stand up; but I say this to you, that you may pay a little attention to persons who may call, and that you may answer the bell if it rings. You may be sure that it is not I."

"Thanks, good Thérèse, thanks; go."

The housekeeper went out, grumbling as usual; and the sound of her heavy and slow step was heard for a long time on the stairs. But as soon as the door was closed Rousseau took advantage of his seclusion to stretch him-

self deliciously on his chair, looked at the birds that pecked upon the window-sill at some crumbs of bread, and enjoyed the sunlight which shone in between the chimneys of the neighboring houses. His fancy, young and active, had no sooner felt its liberty than it spread its wings like the sparrows after their joyous repast. Suddenly the entrance door creaked on its hinges, which disturbed the philosopher's delightful repose. "What!" he said to himself, "already returned! have I slept, when I thought myself only dreaming?"

The door of the cabinet slowly opened in its turn. Rousseau turned his back to this door; convinced that it was Thérèse who was entering, he did not trouble himself. There was a moment's silence. Then in the midst of this silence, "Pardon, Monsieur," said a voice that made the philosopher start.

Rousseau hastily turned round. "What, Gilbert!" he said.

"Yes, Gilbert; once more, pardon, Monsieur Rousseau."

It was, indeed, Gilbert, — but Gilbert pale, his hair dishevelled, his disordered garments scarcely covering his thin and trembling limbs. His appearance made Rousseau shudder, and drew from him an exclamation of pity which resembled anxiety. Gilbert had the fixed and eager eyes of hungry birds of prey; a smile of affected timidity contrasted with this look, as would the upper part of the eagle's solemn head with the lower portion of the cunning head of a wolf or fox.

"What have you come here for?" cried Rousseau, who did not like disorder, and regarded it in another as the sign of an evil purpose.

"Monsieur, I am hungry," replied Gilbert.

Rousseau shuddered at hearing the sound of this voice, uttering the most terrible word in the human language.

"And how did you get in here?" he asked. "The door was locked."

"Monsieur, I knew that Madame Thérèse generally puts the key under the mat. I waited until Madame Thérèse had gone out, for she does not like me, and perhaps would have refused to receive me or take me to you; then, when you were alone, I came up, took the key from its hiding place, and here I am."

Rousseau raised himself on the two arms of his chair.

"Listen to me," said Gilbert, "for a moment, one single moment; I swear to you, Monsieur Rousseau, that I deserve to be heard."

"Well," replied Rousseau, full of amazement at sight of this face, which no longer expressed any of the sentiments common to men.

"I should tell you that I am reduced to such an extremity that I do not know whether to steal, kill myself, or do something still worse. Oh, do not be alarmed, my master and protector," said Gilbert in a voice full of gentleness, "for I think, on reflection, that I shall die without having to kill myself. During the eight days since I fled from Trianon I have wandered in the woods and fields without eating anything but green vegetables or wild fruits. I am weak. I am perishing with fatigue and hunger. As for stealing, it is not from you that I shall attempt it; I like your house too well, Monsieur Rousseau. As for that third thing, oh! to accomplish it —"

"Well?" said Rousseau.

"Well, it needs resolution, which I have come here to seek."

"Are you mad?" cried Rousseau.

"No, Monsieur; but I am very unhappy, full of despair, and would have drowned myself in the Seine this morning, *but for* a reflection which occurred to me."

"What reflection?"

"Why, that you have written, 'Suicide is a robbery committed on mankind.'"

Rousseau looked at the young man as if to say to him, "Do you flatter yourself that I was thinking of you in writing this?"

"Oh, I understand," murmured Gilbert.

"I do not think so," said Rousseau.

"You mean to say, 'Would your death, yours, — the death of a worthless fellow, who possesses nothing, who does nothing, — be worthy to be called an event?'"

"That is not the question," said Rousseau, ashamed of being divined; "but you were hungry, I think."

"Yes; I said so."

"Well, since you knew where the door was, you also know where the bread is; go to the cupboard, take some bread, and go away."

Gilbert did not stir.

"If it is not bread you want, but money, I do not think you wicked enough to maltreat an old man, who was your protector, in the very house that has given you shelter. Be satisfied, then, with this little — here;" and he offered him some pieces of money which he took from his pocket.

Gilbert stayed his hand. "Oh!" he said, with poignant grief, "it is a question neither of money nor bread; you did not understand what I meant when I spoke of killing myself. If I do not kill myself, it is because my life may now be useful to some one, — because my death might rob some one, Monsieur. You, who know all the social laws, all the natural obligations, tell me if there is in this world any tie which should bind a man to life who wishes to die!"

"There are many," said Rousseau.

"To be a father," murmured Gilbert, "is that one of the ties? Look at me while you answer, Monsieur Rousseau, that I may read it in your eyes."

"Yes," stammered Rousseau, — "yes, most certainly. Why this question from you?"

"Monsieur, your words will be a law to me," said Gilbert; "consider them carefully, I entreat you, Monsieur. I am so unhappy that I would like to kill myself; but — but I have a child!"

Rousseau started in astonishment.

"Oh, do not mock at me, Monsieur!" Gilbert said humbly; "you will think you are only pricking my heart when indeed you are opening it as with a poniard. I repeat it, I have a child!"

Rousseau looked at him without answering.

"But for this I should be already dead," continued Gilbert; "in this alternative I said to myself that you would give me good advice, and so I came."

"But," asked Rousseau, "why have I advice to give you? Did you consult me when you committed the fault?"

"Monsieur, this fault — " and Gilbert, with a strange expression, approached Rousseau.

"Well?" said the latter.

"This fault," replied Gilbert, "there are those who call it a crime."

"A crime! All the more reason, then, that you should not speak to me of it. I am a man like you, and not a confessor. Besides, what you tell me does not surprise me. I always foresaw that you would turn out badly; you have a wicked nature."

"No, Monsieur," replied Gilbert, shaking his head, gloomily, — "no, Monsieur, you are mistaken; my mind *is* unnatural, or rather, perverted. I have read many

books which taught me the equality of castes, pride of spirit, the dignity of instincts. These books, Monsieur, had so illustrious authors that a poor peasant like myself might well be led astray. I am lost."

"Ah, ah! I see what you are aiming at, Monsieur Gilbert."

"I?"

"Yes; you are blaming my doctrine. Have you not free will?"

"I do not blame, Monsieur; I say only that I have read. I blame my credulity; I believed, I fell. There are two causes for my crime, — you are the first, and I come, in the first place, to you; I shall next go to the second, but in his turn, and at the proper time."

"In short, what is it you ask of me?"

"Neither gifts, nor shelter, nor bread even, although I am an outcast and hungry. No, I ask of you moral support; I ask you to confirm your doctrine. I ask you to restore by a word my strength, which is broken down, not by inanition in my arms and legs, but by doubt in my head and heart. Monsieur Rousseau, I entreat you, therefore, to tell me if what I have felt for the past eight days is the pain of hunger in the muscles of my stomach, or if it is the torture of remorse in the organs of my mind. In committing a crime, Monsieur, I have begotten a child. Well, then, tell me, must I tear my hair in bitter despair, and roll in the dust crying, Pardon! or must I exclaim, like the woman in Scripture, 'I have done as others; if there is among men a better one than I, let him stone me'? In a word, Monsieur Rousseau, you who must have felt what I feel, answer this question. Say, say, is it natural for a father to abandon his child?"

Gilbert had no sooner spoken thus than Rousseau became paler than Gilbert himself, and losing self-control,

"What right have you to speak to me thus?" he stammered.

"Because, in your house, Monsieur Rousseau, in this garret where you showed me hospitality, I read what you have written on this subject; because you have declared that children born in misery belong to the State, which ought to take care of them; because, in short, you have always considered yourself an honest man, although you have not shrunk from abandoning children which were born to you."

"Miserable fellow," said Rousseau, "you have read my book, and you use such language to me!"

"Well?" said Gilbert.

"Well, you have a wicked mind joined to a wicked heart."

"Monsieur Rousseau!"

"You have misread my books, as you misread human life! You have seen but the surface of the pages, as you see only that of the face! Ah, you expect to make me an accomplice in your crime by citing to me the books I have written, — by saying to me, 'You confess having done this, therefore I may do it!' But, unhappy man, what you do not know, what you have not read in my books, what you have not divined, is that the whole life of him whom you take as an example, this life of misery and suffering, I could exchange for a gilded existence, — voluptuous, full of splendor and pleasure. Have I less talent than Monsieur de Voltaire, and could I not produce as much as he? By applying myself less than I do, could I not sell my books as dear as he sells his, and bring the money rolling into my coffer, keeping always a coffer half-full at the disposal of my book-sellers? Gold attracts gold; do you not know it? I also could have had a carriage for a young and beautiful mistress to ride in, and

you may be sure this luxury would not have dried up the source of an inexhaustible poesy. Have I not passions still? Observe carefully my eyes, which at sixty years yet glow with the ardors of youth and desire. You who have read or copied my books, come, do you not recall that in spite of the decline of years, notwithstanding very real and very serious troubles, my heart, still young, seems to have inherited, in order to suffer more, all the strength of the other parts of my organization? Weighed down with infirmities which prevent me from walking, I feel that I have more vigor and life for sustaining sorrow than I ever had in my youth for the reception of the rare felicities which God has bestowed upon me."

"I know all that, Monsieur," said Gilbert. "I have observed you closely and have understood you."

"Then, if you have observed me closely, if you have understood me, has not my life for you a meaning which others do not see? Does not this strange self-denial, which is unnatural to me, mean that I wish to expiate — "

"Expiate!" murmured Gilbert.

"Have you not understood," continued the philosopher, "that this misery having driven me in the very first place to make an unreasonable resolution, I have since been unable to find any other excuse for this resolution than disinterestedness and perseverance in misery? Have you not understood that I have punished my mind by humiliation? For it was my mind that was guilty, — my mind, which had recourse to paradoxes to justify itself, while on the other hand, I punished my heart by ceaseless remorse."

"Ah!" cried Gilbert, "it is thus you reply to me! it is thus that you philosophers, who fling your written precepts at mankind, plunge us in despair, and then blame us if we are angry with you! Eh! of what consequence is your humiliation to me, when it is secret; your remorse,

when it is unknown? Oh, woe! woe to you, woe! and may the crimes committed in your name fall upon your own head!"

"On my head, you say, curses, — and with them, punishment; for you forget the punishment. Oh, that would be too much! You who have sinned as I have, you condemn yourself as severely as you do me!"

"More severely even," said Gilbert; "for my punishment will be terrible; for since I have no longer faith in anything, I shall let my adversary, or rather my enemy, kill me, — a suicide which my misery recommends, which my conscience excuses; for now my death is no longer a robbery of mankind, and when you wrote that, you wrote what you did not think."

"Stop, unhappy man!" said Rousseau, "stop! have you not done harm enough with foolish credulity? Must you do more still with stupid scepticism? You have spoken to me of a child? You said that you were, or were about to be, a father?"

"I said so," repeated Gilbert.

"Do you realize what it is," murmured Rousseau, in a low voice, "to drag with you, not to death, but to shame, creatures born to breathe freely and innocently the pure air of virtue, a gift of God to every man born into the world? Let me tell you nevertheless, how horrible my condition is. When I abandoned my children, I imagined that society, which all superiority offends, would throw this wrong in my face as an ignominious reproach; then I justified myself with paradoxes; then I employed ten years of my life in advising mothers how to educate their children, — I who did not know what it was to be a father; in advising the nation how to make its citizens brave and honest, — I who had been weak and corrupt. Then one day the executioner, who avenges society, the nation, and the

orphan, unable to reach me, seized my book and burned it as a living shame to the country whose air it had poisoned. Decide, divine judge! was I right in action; was I wrong in my precepts? You do not answer; God himself would be perplexed, — God, who holds in his hand the unerring scales of justice. Well, I have a heart which solves the question; and this heart has said to me from its very depths: 'Woe to you, unnatural father, who have abandoned your children! Woe to you, if you meet the young prostitute who laughs brazenly at night at the street corners; for it may be your abandoned daughter, whom hunger has driven to infamy! Woe to you, if you meet in the street the arrested thief, with his guilt fresh upon him; for he may be your abandoned son, whom hunger has driven to crime!'"

After saying these words, Rousseau who had risen, fell back upon his chair. "And yet," he continued, with a broken voice which had the accent of a prayer, "I have not been as guilty as they believe; I have seen an unfeeling mother, an accomplice in my crime, forget like the animals, and I said to myself, 'God has allowed the mother to forget; it is therefore right for her to forget.' Well, I was at that time in error; and now — since you have heard me say to you what I never before said to any one — you must remain in error no longer."

"So," asked the young man, knitting his brow, "you would never have abandoned your children if you had had money enough to support them?"

"If only what was absolutely needful, — no, never; I swear it, never!" and Rousseau solemnly stretched his trembling hand toward heaven.

"Twenty thousand francs," asked Gilbert, "is that enough to support a child?"

"Yes; it is enough," said Rousseau.

"Good," said Gilbert; "thanks, Monsieur; now I know what remains for me to do."

"And in any event, young as you are, with your labor, you can support your child," said Rousseau. "But you have spoken of crime; they are looking for you, pursuing you perhaps?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Well, conceal yourself here, my boy; you are always welcome to the little garret."

"You are a man I love, Master!" cried Gilbert, "and your offer fills me with joy. Indeed, I ask only a shelter; as for my bread, I will earn it. You know that I am not an idler."

"Well," said Rousseau, appearing uneasy, "if the thing is settled, go up; do not let Madame Rousseau find you here. She never goes up to the garret now; for since your departure we lock up nothing. Your mattress is still there; make yourself as comfortable as possible."

"Thanks, Monsieur; if that is so I am more fortunate than I deserve to be."

"Now is that all you desire?" said Rousseau, looking toward the door.

"No, Monsieur; one word more, if you please."

"Speak."

"One day at Luciennes you accused me of having betrayed you; I did not betray any one, Monsieur, I was pursuing my love affair."

"Let us not speak of that. Is that all?"

"Yes; now, Monsieur Rousseau, when we are ignorant of the address of any one at Paris, can we obtain it?"

"Undoubtedly, when that person is known."

"He of whom I speak is very well known."

"His name?"

"Monsieur le Comte Joseph Balsamo."

Rousseau shuddered; he had not forgotten the meeting in the Rue Plastrière. "What do you want with this man?" he asked.

"A very simple thing. I have accused you — you, my master — of being morally the cause of my crime, since I believed I was only obeying a natural law."

"And I have undeceived you?" cried Rousseau, trembling at the idea of this responsibility.

"You have enlightened me, at least."

"Well, what were you going to say?"

"That my crime had not only a moral cause, but also a physical one."

"And this Comte de Balsamo is the physical cause, is he not?"

"Yes. I have copied examples, I have seized an opportunity; and in this — I see it now — I have acted like a wild animal, and not like a man. You gave me the example; Monsieur le Comte de Balsamo, the opportunity. Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes."

"Give me his address, then."

"Rue Saint Claude."

"Thanks; I shall go to his house immediately."

"Take care, child," exclaimed Rousseau; "he is powerful and adroit."

"Fear nothing, Monsieur Rousseau. I am determined, and you have taught me to keep my temper."

"Quick, quick, — go upstairs!" cried Rousseau; "I hear the gate shut; it is, doubtless, Madame Rousseau coming in. Hide yourself in the garret until she has come in, then you can go away."

"The key, if you please?"

"On the nail, in the kitchen, as usual."

"Adieu, Monsieur, adieu."

"Take some bread; I will prepare you some work for to-night."

"Thanks!" And Gilbert slipped out so quickly that he was already in his garret before Thérèse had reached the second floor.

Furnished with the precious information given him by Rousseau, Gilbert made no delay in putting his project into execution. Indeed, Thérèse had no sooner closed the door of her apartment than the young man, who from the door of his garret had watched all her movements, descended the stairs as rapidly as if he had not been weakened by a long fast. His head was full of hopeful plans, of bitter memories, and over all hovered an avenging spirit which spurred him on with its complaints and accusations. He arrived at Rue Saint Claude in a state difficult to describe. As he entered the court of the hôtel, Balsamo was accompanying to the door the Prince de Rohan, who was paying his generous alchemist a visit. As the prince was leaving, stopping once more to renew his thanks to Balsamo, the poor ragged fellow slipped in like a dog, not daring to look about him for fear of being dazzled.

The carriage of Prince Louis awaited him on the boulevard; the prelate slowly crossed the space that separated him from his carriage, which rapidly rolled away as soon as the door was closed upon him. Balsamo had looked after him sadly, and when the carriage had disappeared he turned toward the steps, upon which stood a sort of beggar in the attitude of supplication. Balsamo stepped up to him, and although his lips were silent, his expressive look was an interrogatory.

"A quarter of an hour's audience, if you please, Monsieur le Comte," said the young man in the ragged clothes.

"Who are you, my friend?" asked Balsamo, with supreme gentleness.

"Do you not recognize me?" asked Gilbert.

"No, — but no matter; come," replied Balsamo, not disturbed by the strange expression of the solicitor, any more than by his ragged garments and his importunity. Walking before him he led him into the nearest apartment, where, seating himself, without change of tone or expression, he said, "You asked if I recognized you?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte."

"Indeed, I think I have seen you somewhere."

"At Taverney, Monsieur, when you came there on the night before the arrival of the dauphiness."

"What were you doing at Taverney?"

"I lived there."

"As servant of the family?"

"No; as member of the family."

"You have left Taverney?"

"Yes, Monsieur; nearly three years since."

"And you came —"

"To Paris, where at first I studied with Monsieur Rousseau; after which I was placed in the gardens at Trianon in the capacity of under-gardener, through the influence of Monsieur de Jussieu."

"These are great names you mention, my friend. What do you want with me?"

"I will tell you;" and pausing, he looked at Balsamo steadily. "Do you remember," he continued, "coming to Trianon during the night of the great storm, six weeks ago next Friday?"

Balsamo's seriousness was changed to melancholy, as he said, "Yes, I remember; you saw me there, perhaps?"

"I saw you."

"Then you come to be paid for the secret?" said Balsamo, in a threatening tone.

"No, Monsieur; for I am more interested than you in keeping this secret."

"Then you are the one they call Gilbert?" said Balsamo.

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte."

Balsamo looked with long and searching gaze at the young man whose name carried with it so terrible a charge. He was surprised, he who was a judge of men, at the assurance of his bearing, at his dignity of speech. Gilbert was standing before a table upon which he did not lean. One of his thin hands, white, even though accustomed to garden work, was hidden in his bosom; the other fell gracefully at his side.

"I see by your countenance," said Balsamo, "why you have come here; you know that Mademoiselle de Taverney has brought a terrible charge against you, that by the aid of science I have forced her to tell the truth; you have come to upbraid me for obtaining this evidence, have you not? to reproach me with this conjuring of a secret which, but for me, would have remained buried in darkness as in a tomb?"

Gilbert only nodded his head.

"You are wrong, however," continued Balsamo; "for, admitting that I had wished to inform against you without being driven to it in my own interest, — for they accused me, — admitting that I had treated you as an enemy, that I had attacked you while defending myself; admitting, I say, all this, you have no right to say anything, for indeed you have committed a base deed."

Gilbert tore his breast with his finger-nails, but answered nothing.

"The brother will pursue you, and the sister will have

you killed," replied Balsamo, "if you have the imprudence to walk as you do about the streets of Paris."

"Oh, as to that, it is of little consequence to me," said Gilbert.

"What! of little consequence to you?"

"Yes; I loved Mademoiselle Andrée. I loved her as no other will ever love her; but she scorned me, — me whose sentiments for her were so respectful; she scorned me, — me who had already held her twice in my arms without even daring to touch with my lips the hem of her dress."

"Precisely, and you have made her pay for this respect, you have avenged yourself for her scorn, by what, — by a snare?"

"Oh, no, no! the snare did not originate with me; an opportunity for committing the crime was furnished me."

"By whom?"

"By you."

Balsamo drew himself up as if a serpent had stung him. "By me?" he cried.

"By you; yes, Monsieur, by you," repeated Gilbert. "Monsieur, you magnetized Mademoiselle Andrée; then you fled. As you went away, her limbs failed her, and she fell. I took her in my arms to carry her to her chamber; I felt her body touching mine, — that contact would have animated a marble statue! I, who loved, yielded to my love. Am I then so criminal as they say, Monsieur? I ask it of you, — of you, the cause of my misfortune."

Balsamo fixed upon Gilbert a look filled with sadness and pity. "You are right, child," he said; "it is I who have caused your crime and the misfortune of this young girl."

"And instead of providing a remedy for it, — you who are so powerful, and who ought to be so good, — you have

aggravated the misfortune of the young girl, you have exposed the criminal to death."

"It is true," replied Balsamo, "and what you say is reasonable. For some time past, look you, young man, I have been a thing accursed, and all the projects of my brain assume, when executed, threatening and pernicious forms. This is the consequence of misfortunes that I also have suffered, and which you do not comprehend. At the same time it is no reason why I should make others suffer; tell me what you want."

"I ask the means of repairing all, Monsieur le Comte, — crime and misfortune."

"You love this young girl?"

"Oh, yes!"

"There are many kinds of love. In what way do you love her?"

"Before possessing her, I loved her to distraction; now, I love her madly. I should die of grief if she received me with anger; I should die of joy if she allowed me to kiss her feet."

"She is of noble birth, but she is poor," said Balsamo, reflecting.

"Yes."

"Yet her brother is a man of heart, who, I think, cares but little for the prerogative of birth. What would happen if you asked this brother for his sister in marriage?"

"He would kill me," Gilbert replied coldly; "however, as I desire death more than I fear it, if you advise me to make this demand, I will do so."

Balsamo considered. "You are a man of sense," he said, "and we may say that you are a man of heart, although your action was really criminal, my complicity apart. Well, seek out not Monsieur de Taverney the son, but the Baron de Taverney, his father, and say to him that on

the day he permits you to marry his daughter, you will bring a dowry to Mademoiselle Andrée."

"I cannot say that, Monsieur le Comte; I have nothing."

"And I tell you that you shall bring her a dowry of one hundred thousand crowns, which I will give you to repair the misfortune and the crime, as you said just now."

"He will not believe me; he knows that I am poor."

"Well, if he does not believe you, show him these bank-notes, and he will no longer doubt." While saying this, Balsamo opened the drawer of a table, and counted thirty notes of ten thousand francs each. He then handed them to Gilbert.

"And is this money?" said the young man.

"Read."

Gilbert cast an eager glance at the roll he was holding in his hand, and saw the truth of what Balsamo said. A joyful light shone in his eyes. "It may be possible!" he cried. "But, no; such generosity would be too sublime."

"You are distrustful," said Balsamo; "you are right; but accustom yourself to choose your subjects for suspicion. Take, then, these hundred thousand crowns, and go to Monsieur de Taverney."

"Monsieur," said Gilbert, "while such a sum is given by word only I cannot believe in the reality of the gift."

Balsamo took a pen and wrote:—

I give to Gilbert as dowry, the day he signs his contract of marriage with Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney, the sum of one hundred thousand crowns, which I have delivered him in advance, in the hope of a successful negotiation.

JOSEPH BALSAMO.

"Take this paper, go, and doubt no longer."

Gilbert received the paper with a trembling hand, "Mon-

sieur," he said, "if I owe you so much happiness, you shall be the god I will worship upon the earth."

"There is but one God to worship," Balsamo answered seriously, "and I am not he. Go, my friend."

"A last favor, Monsieur."

"What is it?"

"Give me fifty francs."

"You ask me for fifty francs when you already have three hundred thousand in your hand?"

"These three hundred thousand francs are not mine," said Gilbert, "until the day when Mademoiselle Andrée consents to marry me."

"And for what are these fifty francs?"

"To purchase a decent coat in which I may present myself to the baron."

"There, my friend," said Balsamo; and he gave him the fifty francs. Upon this he dismissed Gilbert, and with the same slow and melancholy step returned to his apartments.

CHAPTER LII.

GILBERT'S PROJECTS.

Once in the street, Gilbert's feverish imagination was cooled, which at the last words of the count had carried him beyond not only the probable, but also the possible. Arrived at the Rue Pastourel, he sat down upon a milestone, and casting his eyes about him to assure himself that he was not watched, he drew from his pocket the bank-notes all rumpled by the pressure of his hand. A terrible thought had occurred to him, and brought the perspiration to his brow. "Let us see," he said, looking at the notes, "if this man has not deceived me; let us see if he has not set a trap for me; let us see if he does not send me to certain death under pretence of securing my happiness; let us see if he does not treat me as they do the sheep which they allure to the shambles by offering it a bunch of flowering herbs. I have heard it said that there are a great many false notes in circulation, with which the roués of the court cheat the girls of the opera. Let us see if the count has not taken me for a dupe." And he took out of the roll one of the notes of ten thousand francs; then going into a shop, he asked, showing the note, the address of a banker who would change it, having been charged with this commission by his master, he said.

The shop-keeper looked at the note, turned it over and over admiringly, — for it was a magnificent sum, and his

shop was small; then he directed him to the banker in the Rue Sainte Avoie, — therefore the note was good.

Gilbert, happy and elated, gave reins to his imagination, secured more carefully than ever the roll of bills in his handkerchief, and noticing in the Rue Sainte Avoie a dealer in second-hand clothes whose display attracted him, he purchased, for twenty-five francs, — that is, for one of the two louis Balsamo had given him, — a complete suit of maroon cloth whose neatness pleased him, a pair of black silk stockings, a little faded, and shoes with bright buckles; a good linen shirt completed the costume, neat rather than rich, at which Gilbert gave one admiring glance in the mirror of the establishment. Then, leaving his old garments in addition to the twenty-five francs, he put the precious handkerchief in his pocket, and went from the shop of the tailor to that of the hair-dresser, who in a quarter of an hour made this very remarkable head of Balsamo's protégé elegant, and even beautiful.

At last, when all these operations had been accomplished, Gilbert bought a small loaf in a baker's shop near the Place Louis XV., and ate it quickly as he took the road to Versailles. At the fountain of the Conférence he stopped to drink. Then he continued his journey, refusing every proposition of the coachmen, who could not comprehend why a young man so neatly dressed should wish to save fifteen sous at the expense of his polished shoes. What would they have said if they had known that this young man who was travelling on foot had in his pocket three hundred thousand francs? But Gilbert had his reasons for travelling on foot, — in the first place, his firm resolution not to spend more than was absolutely necessary; secondly, the need of seclusion to indulge at his pleasure in pantomime and monologues. God alone *knows* what happy dreams of the future filled the head of

this young man during his walk of two hours and a half. In this time he had walked more than four leagues without noticing the distance, without feeling the least fatigue, so vigorous was his constitution.

All his plans were made, and he had determined to introduce his demand in the following manner: To approach Taverney with ceremonious words; then, when he had the authority of the baron, to address Mademoiselle Andrée with so much eloquence that she would not only pardon him, but would conceive a respect and affection for the author of the pathetic speech he had prepared. The more he thought of it, the more hope triumphed over fear; and it seemed impossible to Gilbert that a girl in Andrée's position should not accept the reparation offered by love, when this love was accompanied by a fortune of one hundred thousand crowns.

Gilbert, in building these castles in the air, was as innocent and honest as the most simple child of primitive times. He forgot all the wrong he had done, and was perhaps more true-hearted than one would think. All these batteries prepared, he arrived with anxious heart at the grounds of Trianon. Once there, he was ready for everything, — for the first wrath of Philippe, which the generosity of his proposal must, he thought, assuage; for the first disdain of Andrée, which must yield to his love; for the first insults of the baron, which his gold would soothe.

Indeed, Gilbert, quite removed from the society in which he had lived, knew instinctively that three hundred thousand francs in his pockets was a safe armor. What he dreaded most was the sight of Andrée's sufferings; in presence of this misfortune only he feared his weakness, — a weakness that would take from him a part of the means necessary for the success of his cause. He entered the

gardens, looking, not without pride, which suited his face well, upon all these workmen, yesterday his companions, to-day his inferiors. The first question he asked was in reference to the Baron de Taverney. He addressed himself naturally to the lackey on service at the offices.

"The baron is not at Trianon," replied the latter.

Gilbert hesitated a moment. "And Monsieur Philippe?" he asked.

"Oh, Monsieur Philippe has gone away with Mademoiselle Andrée!"

"Gone away!" cried Gilbert.

"Yes."

"Mademoiselle Andrée has gone, then?"

"Five days ago."

"To Paris?"

The lackey made a movement as if to say, "I know nothing about it."

"What! you know nothing about it?" cried Gilbert. "Mademoiselle Andrée has gone away without any one knowing where she was going? There must be a reason for her going away, however."

"What nonsense!" replied the lackey, showing little respect for Gilbert's maroon coat; "of course there was a cause for her going away."

"And why did she go?"

"For change of air."

"For change of air?" repeated Gilbert.

"Yes; it seemed that the air of Trianon did not agree with her, and by the doctor's orders she has left Trianon."

It was useless to question further; it was evident that the lackey had said all that he knew about Mademoiselle de Taverney. And yet Gilbert, amazed, could not believe what he had heard. He ran to Andrée's chamber, and *found the* door closed. Fragments of glass, bits of straw

and hay, threads from the mattress strewing the floor, proved to him plainly that there had been a removal. Gilbert entered his old chamber, which remained just as he had left it. Andrée's window was open to admit air to the apartment; he could look through into the antechamber. The apartment was quite empty.

Gilbert then gave way to extravagant grief; he beat his head against the wall, he wrung his hands, he rolled on the floor. Then like a madman, he rushed out of the garret, descended the stairs as if he had wings, plunged into the woods, his hands clutching his hair, and with cries and imprecations he fell down in the midst of the bushes, cursing life and those who had given him birth.

"Oh, it is over, all over!" he murmured. "God does not wish me to find her again; God wishes me to die of remorse, of despair and love. Thus I shall expiate my crime; thus I shall avenge her whom I have wronged. Where can she be? At Taverney! Oh, I will go, I will go! I will go even to the end of the world; I will mount to the clouds, if necessary. Oh, I will trace her, and follow her even if I sink by the way from hunger and fatigue!"

But relieved by degrees by this outburst of grief, Gilbert arose, breathed more freely, looked about him more calmly, and continued at a slow pace his journey to Paris, which he was five hours in accomplishing.

"The baron," he said to himself, with some show of reason, "may not have left Paris; I will speak to him. Mademoiselle Andrée has fled. Indeed, she could not remain at Trianon; but her father must know where she has gone. A word from him will put me on her track; and besides he may recall his daughter if I can succeed in satisfying his avarice."

Gilbert, strong in this new idea, entered Paris about

seven o'clock, — that is, at about the hour when the crowd in the Champs-Élysées were enjoying the cool evening air, when Paris fluctuated between the early fogs of evening and the first rays of that artificial light which extended the day to twenty-four hours.

The young man, carrying out his resolution, went directly to the door of the little hôtel in the Rue Coq-Héron, and knocked without waiting a moment. Silence only answered him. He redoubled his knocks, but without result. This last resource, then, upon which he had relied, had failed him. Mad with rage, biting his hands to punish his body for suffering less than his soul, Gilbert quickly turned the corner of the street, pushed the spring of Rousseau's door, and ascended the stairs. The handkerchief which enclosed the thirty bank-notes also held the key of the garret door. Gilbert rushed in, as he would have thrown himself into the Seine if it had been there. Then, as the evening was fine and the fleecy clouds were sporting in the azure of the sky, as a sweet perfume rose from the lime and chestnut trees in the evening twilight, as the bat beat with its silent wings on the panes of the little window, Gilbert, recalled to life by all these sensations, approached the window, and seeing in the midst of the trees the pavilion of the garden, where once he found Andrée whom he thought to be forever lost, his heart was at the point of breaking, and he fell almost fainting on the edge of the gutter, lost in vague and stupid contemplation.

CHAPTER LIII.

A VAIN STRUGGLE; IN WHICH GILBERT FINDS THAT IT IS EASIER TO COMMIT A CRIME THAN TO CONQUER A PREJUDICE.

As the sensation of grief which had had possession of Gilbert decreased, his ideas became clearer and more definite. In the mean time the increasing darkness prevented him from distinguishing anything; then an unconquerable desire seized him to see the trees, the house, the walks, which the darkness blended into one mass, over which the air wandered as over an abyss. He remembered that one evening, in happier times, he had wished to procure news of Andrée, to see her, to hear her speak even, and that at the peril of his life, suffering still from a sickness which followed the thirtieth of May, he had slid down by the gutter-pipe from the second floor to the bottom, — that is, into the blessed garden itself. At that time there was great danger in forcing a way into that house in which the baron lived, and where Andrée was so well guarded; and yet Gilbert remembered how delightful the situation was, in spite of its danger, and how joyously beat his heart when he heard the sound of her voice. "What if I should do it again," he said to himself; "what if I should go once more, and on my knees search the sanded paths for the adored footprints of my mistress."

This word Gilbert spoke almost aloud, taking a strange pleasure in uttering it. He interrupted his monologue to look searchingly at the place where he thought the pavilion

should be. Then, after a moment's silence and investigation, "There is no indication," he added, "that the pavilion is inhabited by other tenants, — neither light, nor sound, nor open doors. I will go!"

Gilbert had the merit of quickly putting into execution a resolution once formed. He opened the door of the garret, descended on tiptoe like a sylph to the door of Rousseau, and having reached the second floor he boldly seized the gutter-pipe and slid to the ground, at the risk of ruining the pair of breeches new that morning. Having reached the foot of the trellis he experienced once more all the emotions of his first visit to the pavilion; the gravel creaked under his feet, and he recognized the little door by which Nicole had introduced Monsieur de Beausire. At last he went to the steps to press his lips upon the brass button of the window-blind, saying to himself that doubtless Andrée's hand had touched this button. Gilbert's crime had turned his love into a sort of religion.

Suddenly a sound from the inside startled the young man, — a faint and dull sound like that of a light step on the floor. Gilbert retreated. His face was livid; and for the past eight or ten days he had been so distressed in mind that, on seeing a glimmer of light through the door, he thought that superstition — that daughter of ignorance and remorse — held before his eyes one of her sinister torches, and that it was this torch which was shining through the slats of the blinds. He imagined that his soul, laden with terror, conjured another soul, and that one of those hallucinations which visit madmen or enthusiasts had now come upon him. Nevertheless the step and the light approached nearer. Gilbert saw and heard without belief. But the blind suddenly opening, just when the young man drew near to look through the slats, he was thrown by the shock against the wall; he uttered

a loud cry and fell upon his knees. It was not so much the shock which prostrated him thus as the sight exposed to his view; in this house, which he thought deserted, at the door of which he had knocked without answer, he had just seen Andrée.

The young girl, for it was she and not a spirit, uttered a cry as Gilbert had; then, less frightened, for she doubtless expected some one; "What is it?" she asked. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Oh, pardon, pardon, Mademoiselle!" murmured Gilbert, his face humbly turned toward the ground.

"Gilbert, Gilbert here!" cried Andrée, with a surprise free from fear or anger; "Gilbert in this garden! Why have you come here, my friend?"

This last title vibrated painfully in the heart of the young man. "Oh!" he said, with emotion, "do not crush me, Mademoiselle; be merciful, I have suffered so much!"

Andrée looked at Gilbert in astonishment, and like a woman who did not understand such humility. "In the first place," she said, "get up, and explain to me why you are here."

"Oh, Mademoiselle," cried Gilbert, "I will not rise until you have pardoned me!"

"What have you done to me that I should pardon you? Speak, explain yourself. At all events," she continued, with a sad smile, "as the offence cannot be great, the pardon will be easy. Did Philippe give you the key?"

"The key?"

"Certainly; it was agreed that I should admit no one in his absence, and he must have given you the means to enter, unless you have climbed over the walls."

"Your brother, Monsieur Philippe?" stammered Gilbert. "No, no, it is not he; but never mind your brother,

Mademoiselle. You have not gone away, then? you have not, then, left France? Oh, happiness! unhoped for happiness!"

Gilbert had risen on one knee, and with arms extended, he returned thanks to Heaven with strange earnestness.

Andrée leaned toward him and looking at him uneasily, she said, "You speak like a madman, Monsieur Gilbert, and you will tear my dress; let go my dress, I beg you, and put an end to this comedy."

Gilbert rose. "You are angry," he said; "but I must not complain, for I have deserved it well. I know that I ought not to have presented myself in this way; but I did not know that you were living in this pavilion; I believed it empty, solitary; what I came to seek was a remembrance of you, — nothing more. Chance alone — Indeed, I no longer know what I am saying. Pardon me; I wished to speak first to Monsieur your father, but he had disappeared."

Andrée made a movement. "To my father," she said; "and why to my father?"

Gilbert was deceived by this reply. "Oh, because I fear you too much," he said; "and yet I know very well that it is better that everything should be arranged between you and me; it is the surest way of repairing all."

"Repairing! what is that?" asked Andrée, "and what must be repaired? Speak!"

Gilbert looked at her with eyes full of love and humility. "Oh, do not be angry," he said; "certainly it is a great boldness on my part, I who am of so little consequence; it was a great boldness, I say, to look so high, but the injury is done."

Andrée started.

"The crime, if you will," continued Gilbert; "yes, the

crime, for really it was a great crime. Well, of this crime accuse fatality, Mademoiselle, but never my heart —"

"Your heart! your crime! fatality! You are mad, Monsieur Gilbert, and you frighten me."

"Oh, it is impossible that with so much respect, so much remorse, with bowed head, clasped hands, I can inspire in you any other sentiment than that of pity. Mademoiselle, listen to what I am about to say, and it is a sacred pledge I make before God and men. I wish my whole life to be consecrated to expiating the wrong of a moment. I wish your future happiness to be so great that it shall efface all the griefs of the past. Mademoiselle —" Gilbert hesitated. "Mademoiselle, consent to a marriage which will sanctify a criminal union."

Andrée drew back a step.

"No, no," said Gilbert; "I am not a madman; do not attempt to fly, do not snatch away the hands which I clasp; for pity's sake, consent to be my wife."

"Your wife?" exclaimed Andrée, believing that she herself had become mad.

"Oh," continued Gilbert, with heart-rending sobs; "oh, say that you pardon me that horrible night; say that my crime filled you with horror, but say also that you forgive me; say that my love, restrained so long, justified my crime!"

"Wretch!" exclaimed Andrée, with savage fury, "it was you, then? Oh, my God! my God!" and Andrée held her head between her hands as if to prevent the revolting thought from escaping.

Gilbert drew back silent and petrified before this beautiful and pale Medusa's face, which expressed both terror and astonishment.

"Was this misfortune reserved for me, my God!" cried the young girl, with growing excitement, "to see my name

doubly dishonored, — dishonored by the crime, dishonored by the criminal? Answer, wretch! answer villain! It was you, then?"

"She did not know it!" murmured Gilbert, astounded.

"Help! help!" cried Andrée, returning to her apartment. "Philippe! Philippe! here Philippe!"

Gilbert, who had followed her, gloomy and in despair, looked about him, seeking either a place in which to fall nobly under the blows he expected, or something with which to defend himself. But no one came at Andrée's call; she was alone in the apartment.

"Alone! oh, alone!" cried the young girl, in a burst of rage. "Away, villain; do not tempt the anger of God!"

Gilbert gently raised his head. "Your anger," he murmured, "is to me the most fearful of all anger; do not overwhelm me, then, Mademoiselle, have pity!" and he clasped his hands in supplication.

"Assassin! assassin!" screamed the young woman.

"But you will not hear me, then?" exclaimed Gilbert. "Listen to me first at least, and have me killed afterward, if you wish."

"Listen to you! listen to you! — still more torture; and what have you to say? let me hear!"

"What I said just now; that I have committed a crime, — a crime very excusable to one who will read my heart, — and that I bring reparation for that crime."

"Oh!" cried Andrée, "this, then, is the meaning of the word which horrified me even before I comprehended it, — a marriage! I think that was what you said?"

"Mademoiselle!" stammered Gilbert.

"A marriage," continued the proud young girl, more and more excited; "oh, it is not anger I feel toward you, it is scorn, it is hatred! with this scorn there is a feeling so humiliating and at the same time so appalling that

I do not understand how any one living can bear the expression of it as I fling it in your face."

Gilbert turned pale; tears of rage sparkled on his eyelashes; his lips were pinched, whitening like two threads of pearl. "Mademoiselle," he said, trembling, "I am not of so little consequence that I cannot serve to repair the loss of your honor."

Andrée drew herself up. "If there were any question of the loss of honor, Monsieur," she said proudly, "it would be of your honor, not of mine. Such as I am, my honor is unsullied, and it would be in marrying you that I should be dishonored!"

"I did not think," said Gilbert, in a cold and incisive tone, "that a woman when she became a mother ought to consider anything in the world but the future of her child."

"And I do not suppose that you dare to interest yourself in that, Monsieur," retorted Andrée, with sparkling eyes.

"On the contrary, Mademoiselle, I am interested in it," replied Gilbert, beginning to rise from beneath the infuriated foot that trampled on him. "I am interested, for I do not wish this child to perish with hunger, as often happens in the houses of the great, where girls interpret honor in a manner of their own. All men are equal; some of the greatest men have proclaimed this maxim. That you should not love me I can conceive, for you do not see my heart; that you should scorn me I can conceive also, for you do not know my thoughts; but that you should refuse me the right to be interested in my child, I can never understand. Alas! in seeking to marry you I have not sought to satisfy a desire, a passion, an ambition; I have performed a duty, I have devoted myself to be your slave, I have offered you my life. Eh, *mon Dieu!* you would never have borne my name; had you wished, you might have continued to treat me as the gardener Gilbert; that would be just. But it would not be just for you to sacri-

fice your child. Here are three hundred thousand francs which a generous protector, who has judged me differently from you, gives me for a dowry. If I marry you this money belongs to me. Now, for myself, Mademoiselle, I need nothing but a little air to breathe if I live, and a hole in the ground to hide my body if I die. Everything else I give to my child. See, here are the three hundred thousand francs," and he laid the bunch of bank-notes on the table, almost under Andrée's hand.

"Monsieur," said Andrée, "you are making a serious mistake; you have no child."

"I?"

"Of what child are you speaking, then?" asked Andrée.

"Why, that of which you are the mother. Have you not admitted in the presence of two persons — your brother Philippe and the Comte de Balsamo — that you were enceinte, and that it was I, I, unhappy —"

"Ah, you heard that?" cried Andrée; "well, so much the better, so much the better. Then, Monsieur, this is my reply to you: You have basely done me violence; you have possessed me in my sleep; you have possessed me by a crime. I am a mother, it is true; but my child has only a mother, — do you understand? You have violated me, it is true; but you are not the father of my child," and seizing the bank-notes she threw them disdainfully out of the room, in such a manner that they touched in their flight the whitening face of the unhappy Gilbert. Then he felt an impulse of anger so profound that Andrée's good angel might well have trembled for her a second time. But that fury was restrained by its own violence, and Gilbert went out from Andrée's presence without even looking at her. He had no sooner passed over the threshold than she darted after him, and closed doors, blinds, windows, and shutters, as if by this violent action she would place *the universe between* the present and the past.

CHAPTER LIV.

RESOLUTION.

How Gilbert returned to his room; how, without expiring of pain and anger, he sustained the anguish of the night; how he rose without at least a blanching of his hair, — we shall not attempt to explain to the reader.

When daylight came Gilbert had a strong desire to write to Andrée and state to her all the arguments, so solid and so straightforward, which had sprung up in his mind during the night. But under too many circumstances already had he observed the young girl's unbending character to cherish now any further hope. Besides, to write would be a concession revolting to his pride; and his letter would perhaps be crumbled up and thrown away without being read; it might put upon his track a pack of furious, unintelligent enemies. He then thought that his proposition would perhaps be more favorably received by the father, who was avaricious and ambitious, or by the brother, who was a man of heart, and whose first movement alone was to be feared. "But," said he, to himself, "of what use to be supported by Monsieur de Taverney or by Monsieur Philippe, since Andrée will pursue me with her eternal 'I do not know you'? It is well," he added, "nothing now attaches me to that woman; she herself has taken pains to sunder the bonds that united us." He said this while rolling with anguish on his mattress, while recalling with rage the smallest details of Andrée's voice and face; he said this while suffering indescribable torment, for he loved her to distraction.

When the sun, already high above the horizon, penetrated the garret, Gilbert rose, excited by a last hope of seeing his enemy in the garden or even in the pavilion. It was still a joy in his misery. But suddenly a bitter flood of hatred, remorse, and rage overwhelmed his thought; he recalled all the scorn and contempt which the young girl had inflicted on him, and stopping in the middle of the room, by a command suddenly imposed by will on matter, "No," he said, "you shall not go to look out at that window; you shall not inhale that poison of which you would be glad to die. She is a cruel person, who never, when you bowed your head before her, smiled at you, or gave you a word of consolation or of friendship; who took pleasure in rending your heart, when still full of innocence and chaste love. She is a creature without honor and without religion, who has denied to her child its father, its natural support, and who condemns the poor little thing to neglect, to misery, to death, perhaps; because that child dishonors the womb in which it was conceived. Well, no, Gilbert; criminal as you were, amorous and base as you are, I forbid you to approach that window, or cast a glance in the direction of that pavilion. I forbid you to commiserate the fate of that woman, or to weaken the springs of your life by dwelling on what is past. Employ your life, like the brute, in work and the satisfaction of material wants. Make use of the time that will elapse between the affront and vengeance; and remember always that the only way to self-respect and to a position higher than that of these haughty nobles is to be more noble still than they."

Pale, trembling, urged by the impulses of his heart in the direction of the window, Gilbert nevertheless obeyed the command of his reason. He might have been seen moving little by little, slowly, step by step, toward the

door of the stairway. At last he went out on his way to Balsamo's house. But suddenly he returned, saying to himself, "Fool! wretched fool that I am! I spoke, I think of vengeance; and what is the vengeance I would have? Kill the woman? Oh, no; she would die happy in having inflicted on me an additional burden. Dishonor her publicly? Oh, that is a coward's way. Is there a sensitive place in that creature's soul where my needle thrust may cause as much pain as a thrust of a dagger? It is humiliation; she must be humiliated, — yes, for she has even more pride than I. How, then, can I humiliate her? I am nothing, I have nothing, and doubtless she is about to disappear. To be sure, my presence, my frequent appearance, my look of scorn or of defiance would punish her cruelly. I know well that a mother without pity must be a sister without heart, and she might send her brother to kill me. But what prevents my learning how to kill a man, as I have learned how to reason and to write? What prevents my overcoming Philippe, disarming him, and laughing in the face of the avenger, as in that of the offended person herself? No, that savors too much of comedy; in doing that one reckons on his skill and experience, without considering the intervention of God or of chance. Alone, I alone, with my bare arm, with my reason clipped of imagination, with the strength of my muscles given by nature, with the force of my mind, I will reduce to nothing the projects of those miserable — What does Andrée wish; what does she possess; what does she place before her for her defence and my injury? Let me think."

Then, sitting on the edge of the projection of the wall, bending forward and gazing with fixed eyes, Gilbert meditated profoundly. "Whatever might please Andrée," he said, "is what I detest; I must therefore destroy whatever

I detest. Destroy? Oh, no; my vengeance must never drive me to evil deeds; it must never persuade me to use fire or the sword. What, then, remains? This: to seek the cause of Andrée's superiority, — to discover by what chain she will restrain at the same time my heart and my arm — Oh, to see her no more! — to be no more looked upon by her! Oh, to pass within two steps of that woman when, smiling with her insolent beauty, she holds by the hand her child — her child who will never know me — Heavens and earth!"

Gilbert accentuated that phrase with a furious blow of the fist on the wall, and with an oath more terrible still. "Her child! here is the whole secret. It is not necessary that she should ever possess that child, whom she would accustom to execrate the name of Gilbert. It is necessary, on the contrary, for her to learn that the child will grow up execrating the name of Andrée. In a word, that child, whom she would not love, whom she would torture, perhaps, for she has a bad heart, — that child, with whom they would continually scourge me, Andrée must never see, but, losing it, she must rage and moan like a lioness deprived of her young."

Gilbert rose, handsome in his wrath and savage joy. "That is it," he said, extending his fist toward Andrée's pavilion. "You have condemned me to shame, to loneliness, to remorse, to love; I condemn you to suffering without result, to loneliness, to shame, to terror, to hate without vengeance. You will seek for me, — I shall have fled. You will cry out for your child, if only to tear it to pieces on recovering it; but it will be at least a rage of desire which I shall have kindled in your soul; it will be a blade without a hilt which I shall have plunged into your heart. Yes, yes; the child! I shall have the child, Andrée. I shall have, not your child, as you said,

but mine. Gilbert will have his child! — a child noble on the mother's side. My child! — my child!" and gradually he excited himself to transports of intoxicating joy. "Now," said he, "I have nothing to do with vulgar spite or pastoral lamentation; I have to do with a serious undertaking. There is no longer any reason to order my eyes not to seek yonder pavilion; I must order all my energy, all my soul, to watch, that the success of my enterprise may be assured. I will watch, Andrée," he said solemnly, and going nearer to the window, "day and night. You will not make a movement that I shall not see; you will not utter a cry of grief for which I shall not promise you a grief more bitter; you will not exhibit a smile to which I shall not reply by a sardonic and insulting laugh. You are my prey, Andrée; a part of you is my property. I watch, I watch!"

Gilbert then went to the window, and saw the blinds of the pavilion opened; then Andrée's shadow glide over the curtains and the ceiling of the chamber, reflected doubtless by some mirror. Presently Philippe entered, who had risen earlier, but who had been at work in his own room, situated behind Andrée's. Gilbert noticed that their conversation was animated. Doubtless they spoke of him, and of the scene of the evening before. Philippe walked about, showing signs of perplexity. That visit by Gilbert had perhaps induced them to modify their plans; perhaps they would go away in search of peace, obscurity, oblivion. At that idea Gilbert's eyes became luminous rays, which might have set fire to the pavilion and penetrated to the centre of the world.

But very soon a servant-girl entered by the garden-door; she brought a recommendation of some kind. Andrée came to an agreement with her, for she installed herself at once, with her little bundle of clothes, in the chamber

formerly occupied by Nicole. Furthermore, certain recent purchases of furniture, utensils, and provisions satisfied the vigilant Gilbert that the brother and sister intended to remain quietly in that habitation.

Philippe examined with close scrutiny the locks on the garden-door. What especially convinced Gilbert that he was suspected of having entered by using a false key, given him perhaps by Nicole, was that the locksmith, in Philippe's presence, changed the wards of the locks. It inspired Gilbert with the first joy he had experienced since these events began. He smiled ironically. "Poor creatures!" he murmured; "they are not very dangerous. They strengthen the lock, and do not even suspect that I had the daring to scale the wall. A poor idea they have of you, Gilbert! So much the better. Yes, proud Andrée, in spite of the locks on your door, if I wished to penetrate to you I could do it. But it is my turn for good fortune; I scorn you, and unless caprice —" He pirouetted on his heels, imitating the roués of the court. "But no," he continued bitterly, "this is more worthy of me; I want no more of you. Sleep in peace; I have what is better than possession of you, with which to torture you at my ease. Sleep!"

Gilbert left the window, and after giving a glance at his clothes, he descended the stairs, and started out to visit Balsamo.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FIFTEENTH OF DECEMBER.

Gilbert found no difficulty, as far as Fritz was concerned, in being admitted to Balsamo.

The count was resting on a sofa, like a rich and idle man, from the fatigue of having slept all night, — at least so Gilbert thought, seeing him lying there at so early an hour. The order must have been given to the valet to admit Gilbert whenever he should present himself, for he had no occasion to give his name.

As Gilbert entered, Balsamo rose upon his elbow and closed his book, which he held open without reading. "Oh, oh!" said he, "here is a fellow who is going to be married."

Gilbert did not answer.

"Good!" said the count, resuming his indolent attitude; "you are happy and almost grateful. You come to thank me; it is superfluous. Keep that, Gilbert, for new occasions. Thanks are a currency which is generally satisfactory when bestowed with a smile. There, my friend, there!"

There was in these words and in Balsamo's tone an accent mournful and gentle, which struck Gilbert as conveying at the same time a reproach and a revelation.

"No," he said; "you are mistaken, Monsieur. I am not to marry at all."

"Ah!" said the count, "what are you going to do? What has happened?"

"I have been rejected," replied Gilbert.

The count turned completely round. "You have misunderstood, my friend."

"No, Monsieur; I think not, at least."

"Who rejected you?"

"The young lady."

"Of course; why did you not speak to her father?"

"Because fate ordered otherwise."

"Ah, we are fatalist?"

"I have not the capacity for possessing faith."

Balsamo frowned, and looked at Gilbert with a sort of curiosity. "Do not speak of things of which you are ignorant," he said; "with men it is stupidity, with children it is presumption. I will permit you to have pride, but not to be an idiot; tell me that you have not the capacity to be a fool, and I will approve. In short, what have you done?"

"This: Like the poets, I wished to dream instead of act; I wished to walk in the avenues where I had enjoyed dreaming of love, and suddenly the reality presented itself to me before I was prepared for it. The reality killed me at once."

"Again it serves you right, Gilbert; for a man in such a situation as yours resembles the scouts of the army. Those men must march with the musket in the right hand and a dark-lantern in the left hand."

"In short, Monsieur, I have failed. Mademoiselle Andrée called me villain, assassin, and said that she would have me killed."

"Good! but her child?"

"She told me that the child was hers, not mine."

"What next?"

"Then I retired."

"Ah!"

Gilbert looked up. "What would you have done?" he said.

"I do not know yet. Tell me what you wish to do."

"To punish her for subjecting me to such humiliations."

"Mere words, that."

"No, Monsieur; it is a resolution."

"But you allowed her, perhaps, to wrest your secret from you, your money?"

"My secret is my own, and no one shall have it. The money is yours; I have brought it back," and Gilbert opened his vest and drew from it the thirty notes, which he counted carefully, spreading them out on Balsamo's table.

The count took them, folded them, all the time watching Gilbert, whose face betrayed not the slightest emotion. "He is honest; he is not covetous. He has sense, firmness; he is a man," he thought.

"Now, Monsieur le Comte," said Gilbert, "I have to give you an account of the two louis you gave me."

"Do not overdo it," replied Balsamo; "it is handsome to return one hundred thousand crowns; it is childish to return forty-eight francs."

"I did not wish to return them; I only wished to tell you what I had done with these louis, that you may know that I need others."

"That is different. You ask, then?"

"I ask."

"For what?"

"For means to do what just now you called 'mere words.'"

"Be it so. You wish to avenge yourself."

"Nobly, I think."

"I do not doubt it; but cruelly?"

"Yes, cruelly."

"How much do you need?"

"Twenty thousand francs."

"And you will not touch this young woman?" said Balsamo, expecting to check Gilbert by this question.

"I will not touch her."

"Her brother?"

"Neither her brother, nor her father."

"You will not calumniate her?"

"I will never speak her name."

"Good; I understand you. But it is equally as bad to kill a woman with continual insults, as to stab her with a weapon. You wish to defy her by showing yourself, by following her, by heaping upon her smiles full of insult and hatred."

"I have so little desire to do this, that I come to ask for means for crossing the sea without expense to myself, in case I should desire to leave France."

"Master Gilbert," exclaimed Balsamo, with eager and caressing tone, which contained however neither grief nor joy, — "Master Gilbert, it seems to me that you are not consistent with your display of disinterestedness. You ask me for twenty thousand francs, and from this sum you cannot take one thousand for passage money?"

"No, Monsieur; and there are two reasons for that."

"Let me hear the reasons?"

"In the first place, I shall not have a farthing on the day I embark; for mark this well, Monsieur le Comte, it is not for myself I ask it, — I ask it for the reparation of a wrong which you facilitated — "

"Ah, you are tenacious!" said Balsamo, with pinched lips.

"Because I am right. I ask you for money for reparation, I tell you, and not for my living or for my own comfort. Not a sou of these twenty thousand francs will touch my pocket; they have their destination."

"Your child; I see that —"

"My child; yes, Monsieur," replied Gilbert, with a certain pride.

"But yourself?"

"I am strong, free, and intelligent; I can always live. I wish to live."

"Oh, you will live! God never gives such strength of will to souls which are to leave this earth prematurely. God clothes warmly the plants which have to endure long winters; he gives armor of steel to hearts which must bear heavy trials. But you have, it seems to me, told me of two reasons for not appropriating one thousand francs, — in the first place, delicacy."

"Secondly, prudence. When I leave France, I must do so secretly. Now, I cannot succeed in this, if I seek out some captain in the port, paying him myself, — for I presume it is done in that way, — it is not, I say, by going out to sell myself that I shall succeed in hiding myself."

"Then you suppose that I can aid you in disappearing?"

"I know that you can."

"Who told you so?"

"Oh, you have too many supernatural means at your disposal not to have a whole storehouse of natural means. A sorcerer is never so sure of himself that he has not some haven of safety."

"Gilbert," said Balsamo, suddenly, extending his hand to the young man, "you are a bold, adventurous spirit; you are made up of evil and good like a woman; you are stoical and unaffectedly upright, — I will make a very great man of you. Stay here, I say; this hôtel is a safe asylum; besides, I leave Europe in a few months, — I will take you away."

Gilbert listened. "In a few months I would not decline your offer; but to-day I must say, Thanks, Monsieur

le Comte, your proposal is dazzling to a poor man; at the same time I refuse it."

"A moment's vengeance is worth more than a future of fifty years, perhaps?"

"Monsieur, while my fancy or my caprice possesses me it is always worth to me more than the whole universe; and besides vengeance, I have a duty to fulfil."

"There are your twenty thousand francs," replied Balsamo, without hesitation.

Gilbert took two bank-notes, and looking at his benefactor, "You give like a king!" he said.

"Oh, better, I hope," said Balsamo; "for I do not ask even to be remembered."

"But I am grateful, as you said just now; and when my task shall be accomplished, I will pay you these twenty thousand francs."

"How can you do that?"

"By putting myself in your service for as many years as will be required for a servant to pay his master twenty thousand francs."

"You are again illogical, Gilbert. You said to me a moment ago, 'I ask you for twenty thousand francs, *which you owe me.*'"

"That is true; but you have won my heart."

"I am glad of it," said Balsamo, coldly. "So, you will be mine, if I wish it?"

"Yes."

"What do you know how to do?"

"Nothing; but I am capable of everything."

"That is true."

"But I wish to have in my pocket the means for leaving France in two hours, if necessary."

"Ah, my service is then deserted."

"I shall be sure to return to you."

"And I shall be sure to find you again. Well, let us finish; it tires me to talk so long. Draw up the table."

"There it is."

Balsamo took from it some papers, and began to read half-aloud the following lines upon one of the papers, inscribed with three signatures, or rather three strange ciphers: "'The fifteenth of December, from Havre for Boston, P. J. the Adonis.' What do you think of America, Gilbert?"

"That it is not France, and that I shall be very glad to go by sea, at a certain moment, into any country whatever that is not France."

"Good! About the fifteenth of December; is not that the time to which you allude?"

Gilbert counted on his fingers, reflecting. "Precisely," he said.

Balsamo took a pen and wrote upon a fresh sheet these two lines, —

Receive upon the "Adonis" a passenger.

JOSEPH BALSAMO.

"But this paper is dangerous," said Gilbert, "and I who seek a shelter may find the Bastille."

"By having too much imagination one becomes absurd," said the count. "The 'Adonis,' my dear Monsieur Gilbert, is a merchant vessel of which I am the principal owner."

"Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte," said Gilbert, bowing; "I am indeed an unhappy fellow whose head is sometimes turned, — but never twice in succession. Pardon me, and believe in my gratitude."

"Go, my friend."

"Adieu, Monsieur le Comte."

"Au revoir," said Balsamo, turning away.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE LAST AUDIENCE.

In November, that is several months after the events we have related had taken place, Philippe de Taverney went out very early in the morning, considering the season, — that is to say, at daybreak, — from the house in which he lived with his sister. Already all the little Parisian industries were astir under the lamps still lighted. There were the little smoking cakes which the poor merchant from the country devours as a feast in the keen morning air, the trucks loaded with vegetables, the carts full of fish and oysters going to market; and there was, in all this bustle of the laborious crowd, a sort of restraint imposed upon the workmen by respect for the sleep of the rich.

Philippe hurried across the populous and crowded quarter in which he lived, to reach the Champs-Élysées, which was absolutely deserted.

The leaves were turning red upon the tops of the trees; the beaten walks of the Queen's Court, and the bowling-greens, abandoned at this hour, were hidden under a thick carpet of these rustling leaves.

The young man was dressed like the rich bourgeois of Paris, in a coat with long skirts, in breeches and silk stockings; he carried a sword; his carefully arranged hair indicated that he must have been in the hands of his hairdresser long before daybreak. So, when Philippe saw that the morning wind was deranging his hair and scattering the powder, he threw a glance full of displeasure upon the

avenue of the Champs-Élysées, to see if any of the public carriages on this route were not already running. Nor did he have long to wait. A carriage worn out, faded, broken, drawn by a starved, dun mare, came jolting along the street; its driver, with a watchful eye and dejected expression, searched afar among the trees for a passenger, as Æneas watched for one of his vessels on the waves of the sea. On perceiving Philippe he applied his whip, and the carriage came up with the passenger.

"Arrange," said Philippe, "to have me at Versailles at nine o'clock precisely, and you shall have half a crown."

In fact, at nine o'clock Philippe had with the dauphiness one of those morning audiences which she had begun to give. Alert, and freeing herself from every law of etiquette, the princess was accustomed to inspect every morning the work which she was having done at Trianon; and meeting on her way the solicitors to whom she had granted an interview, she disposed of them rapidly, with a presence of mind and an affability which did not exclude dignity, sometimes even haughtiness, when she perceived that her condescension was misconstrued.

Philippe had at first resolved to make the journey on foot, for he was reduced to the severest economy; but the sentiment of self-respect, or perhaps only that of the respect, which no military man ever loses, for his correct appearance in the presence of a superior, had constrained the young man to dispense with economy for one day, that he might present himself properly at Versailles. He expected, indeed, to return on foot. So, on the same step of the ladder, starting from two opposite points, the patrician Philippe and the plebeian Gilbert had, as we may see, come together.

Philippe beheld again with heavy heart that Versailles.

still magical, where so many golden and roseate dreams had enchanted him with their promises. He beheld again, with broken heart, Trianon, memorial of misfortune and disgrace. At nine o'clock exactly, provided with his letter of audience, he sauntered in the little walk near the pavilion. He perceived, at a distance of a hundred paces, the princess conversing with her architect, enveloped in furs though the weather was not cold. The young dauphiness, with a little hat in the style of that worn by the ladies of Watteau, was distinctly outlined against the green hedges. At times the sound of her silvery and vibrating voice reached Philippe, and awakened in him sentiments which ordinarily efface all chagrin in a wounded heart.

Several persons, favored like Philippe with an audience, presented themselves one after another at the door of the pavilion, in the antechamber of which an usher came to seek them in their turn. Placed along the course of the princess, whenever she returned, with Mique upon her footsteps, these persons received a word from Marie Antoinette, or even the special favor of an exchange of several words spoken privately. Then the princess would wait for another visitor to present himself.

Philippe remained the last. He had seen already the eyes of the princess turning toward him, as if she tried to recognize him; then he blushed and endeavored to assume in his place a modest and patient attitude. The usher came to him at length, and asked if he would not also present himself, since Madame la Dauphine was about to go in, and once having returned she would receive no one. Philippe therefore went forward. The dauphiness did not lose sight of him while he advanced over that distance of a hundred paces, and he chose the most favorable moment to make his respectful salutation.

The dauphiness turned to the usher, saying, "The name of this person who salutes?"

The usher read the letter of audience. "Monsieur Philippe de Taverney, Madame," he replied.

"It is true," said the princess; and she looked at the young man with an expression of interest. Philippe stood in an attitude of deference.

"Good-day, Monsieur de Taverney," said Marie Antoinette; "how is Mademoiselle Andrée?"

"Quite ill, Madame," replied Philippe; "but my sister will be made happy by this evidence of interest your Highness deigns to show her."

The dauphiness did not reply. She read the traces of suffering on Philippe's pale and wasted features, and could scarcely recognize, in the modest garb of a citizen, that handsome officer who had first served her as guide upon the soil of France.

"Monsieur Mique," said she, approaching the architect, "we have, then, agreed concerning the ornamentation of the dancing-hall; the grove in the neighborhood is already decided upon. Pardon me for keeping you so long in the cold."

This was equivalent to a dismissal; Mique saluted and went away. The dauphiness bowed to those persons who still were waiting, and they immediately retired.

Philippe understood that signal to be addressed to him as well as to the rest, and already his heart was oppressed, when the dauphiness, coming to him, said, "You say, then, Monsieur, that your sister is ill?"

"If not ill, Madame, at least drooping."

"Drooping!" cried the dauphiness, with interest, — "she, in so good health!"

Philippe bowed. The young princess cast at him one of those searching glances which, in speaking of a man of

her rank, we should call an eagle's glance. Then after a pause, "Allow me to walk a little," said she; "the wind is chilly."

She advanced a few steps; Philippe remained in his place.

"What! you do not follow me?" said Marie Antoinette, turning.

Philippe made two bounds, and rejoined her.

"Why have you not sooner informed me of the condition of Mademoiselle Andrée, in whom I am interested?"

"Alas!" said Philippe, "your Highness has just said the word; your Highness was interested in my sister, but now —"

"I am interested in her still, Monsieur; and yet it seems to me that Mademoiselle de Taverney left my service unseasonably."

"Necessity, Madame!" said Philippe, in a low voice.

"What! that word 'necessity' is alarming; explain that word to me, Monsieur."

Philippe made no reply.

"Doctor Louis," continued the dauphiness, "has stated to me that the air of Versailles was injurious to the health of Mademoiselle de Taverney, which might be restored by a residence in the family home. This is all that I have learned. Now, your sister paid me but one visit before her departure. She was pale; she was sad. I must say that she showed me much devotion in that interview, for she wept copiously."

"Sincere tears, Madame," said Philippe, whose heart beat violently, "the source of which is not exhausted."

"I fancied," continued the princess, "that your father had compelled his daughter to come to court, and that the child regretted your country — some attachment —"

"Madame," Philippe hastened to say, "my sister regrets only your Highness."

"And she suffers — Strange illness, which the country air was to cure, and which it aggravates."

"I will not longer deceive your Highness," said Philippe; "my sister's illness is a profound sorrow, which has driven her nearly to despair. Mademoiselle de Taverney, however, loves in this world only your Highness and myself; but she begins to prefer God to all affections. And the audience which I have had the honor to solicit, Madame, is for the purpose of asking your aid respecting this desire of my sister."

The dauphiness raised her head. "She wishes to enter the religious life, does she not?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And you will suffer it, — you, who love that child?"

"I think I judge rightly her position, Madame; and this counsel came from me. Still, I love my sister too much for this counsel to be suspected, and the world will not ascribe it to avarice on my part. I have nothing to gain by Andrée's withdrawing to a cloister; neither of us possesses anything."

The dauphiness paused, and with a stealthy glance at Philippe, "That is what I was saying just now, when you would not understand me, Monsieur; you are not rich."

"Your Highness — "

"No false shame, Monsieur; the happiness of that poor girl is at stake. Answer me sincerely, like an honest man, — as I am sure you are."

The brilliant and loyal eyes of Philippe met the gaze of the princess, and were not lowered. "I will reply, Madame," he said.

"Well, is it through necessity that your sister wishes to leave the world? Let her speak. Good God! princes

are unfortunate. God has given them hearts to pity the suffering; but he has refused them that supreme clear-sightedness which can discover suffering under the veil of reserve. Answer, then, frankly; is that it?"

"No, Madame," said Philippe, with firmness, "it is not that; nevertheless, my sister wishes to enter the convent of Saint Denis, and we have but a third of the entrance-money."

"The entrance-money is sixty thousand francs!" cried the princess; "you have, then, only twenty thousand francs?"

"Hardly that, Madame; but we know that your Highness can, by a word, and without opening your purse, give admission to the convent."

"Certainly I can."

"This, then, is the single favor which I shall venture to solicit from your Highness, unless you have already promised to some one else your intercession with Madame Louise."

"Colonel, you surprise me strangely," said Marie Antoinette. "What! so near to me I have so much noble poverty! Eh, Colonel, you should not thus have deceived me."

"I am not colonel, Madame," replied Philippe, gently; "I am only your Highness's devoted servant."

"Not colonel, you say? And since when?"

"I have never been colonel, Madame."

"The king promised in my presence a regiment —"

"The commission for which was never sent."

"But you had a rank —"

"Which I have resigned, Madame, having fallen into disgrace with the king."

"Why?"

"I do not know."

"Oh!" said the dauphiness, with deep sadness, — "oh, the court!"

Philippe smiled sorrowfully. "You are an angel from heaven, Madame," he said; "and I regret not serving the house of France, that I might have an opportunity of dying for you."

A light so vivid and so warm came into the eyes of the dauphiness that Philippe hid his face in his hands. The princess did not even try to console him, or to draw from him the sentiment that overpowered him at that moment. Silent, and breathing with effort, she picked the petals of some Bengal roses, plucked from their stem by her nervous and trembling hand.

Philippe recovered himself. "Pardon me, Madame," he said.

Marie Antoinette did not reply to these words. "Your sister will enter Saint Denis to-morrow, if she wishes," she said, with feverish excitement; "and you in a month will be at the head of a regiment. I am determined."

"Madame," replied Philippe, "will you still have the goodness to hear me in my last explanations? My sister accepts the gift of your Royal Highness; as for myself, I must refuse it."

"You refuse?"

"Yes, Madame; I have received an affront from the court; the enemies who have inflicted it on me would find a way to wound me more severely, on seeing me in higher station."

"What! even under my protection?"

"Especially because of your gracious protection, Madame," said Philippe, resolutely.

"It is true," said the princess, turning pale.

"And then, Madame, — no, I forget, in speaking with you, that there is no more happiness on earth; I forget

that once entered into obscurity, I must no more leave it. In obscurity a man of heart prays and remembers."

Philippe pronounced these words with an accent that made the princess start. "A day will come," said she, "when I shall have the right to say what now I can only think. Monsieur, your sister may enter at Saint Denis whenever she pleases."

"Thanks, Madame, thanks."

"As to yourself — I wish you to make me a request."

"But, Madame — "

"I wish it."

Philippe saw the gloved hand of the princess extended toward him; it remained suspended, as if in expectation, perhaps it expressed only command. The young man knelt, took the hand, and slowly, with a swelling and palpitating heart touched it with his lips.

"The request! come!" said the dauphiness, so moved that she did not withdraw her hand.

Philippe bowed his head. A flood of bitter thoughts overwhelmed him. He remained some seconds silent and motionless; then, rising, pale and dull-eyed, "A passport to leave France," said he, "the day my sister enters the convent of Saint Denis."

The dauphiness recoiled as if terrified. Then, seeing all that grief, which doubtless she comprehended, which perhaps she shared, she could reply only by the words, hardly intelligible, "It is well." And she disappeared in an avenue of cypress-trees, the only ones that had preserved intact their everlasting leaves, a mantle of the tomb.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE CHILD WITHOUT A FATHER.

The day of pain, the day of shame drew near. Andrée, notwithstanding the visits, more and more frequent, of the good Doctor Louis, notwithstanding the affectionate care and consolations of Philippe, became continually more depressed, like the condemned whose last hour approaches. The unhappy brother sometimes found Andrée dreamy and trembling; her eyes were dry; for whole days she would not speak; then suddenly she would rise and make several turns around her chamber, trying, like Dido, to get away from herself, — that is to say, from the sorrow that was killing her.

At length, seeing her one evening paler, more uneasy, more nervous than usual, Philippe sent for the doctor to come at once. It was the twenty-ninth of November. Philippe had had the art to keep Andrée sitting up until a late hour; he had entered with her upon subjects of conversation the most gloomy, the most intimate, those even which the young girl dreaded, as the wounded man dreads a rough and heavy hand approaching his wound. He was sitting near the fire. The servant, on starting for Versailles to get the doctor, had forgotten to close the blinds, so that the reflection of the lamp, that of the fire even, cast a soft light on the carpet of snow thrown on the soil of the garden by the first frosts of winter.

Philippe waited till Andrée's mind began to grow calm, and then, without preamble, "Dear sister," he said, "have you at last come to a decision?"

"On what subject?" replied Andrée, with a sigh of pain.

"On the subject — of your child, sister."

Andrée started.

"The time approaches," continued Philippe.

"My God!"

"And I should not be surprised if to-morrow —"

"To-morrow?"

"To-day, even, dear sister."

Andrée became so pale that Philippe, alarmed, took hold of her and kissed her hand. She presently recovered, "Brother," she said, "I will not practise toward you the hypocrisies which dishonor vulgar souls. Expectation of good is in my mind confounded with expectation of evil. What is evil I no longer know, since I have lost confidence in what is good. So do not judge me more severely than one would judge a foolish person, — unless you prefer to take seriously the philosophy which I am about to outline to you, and which, I assure you, is the perfect, consummate expression of my sentiments as I gather it from my experience."

"Whatever you may say, Andrée, whatever you may do, you will always be to me the dearest, the most respected of women."

"Thank you, my only friend. I dare to say that I am not unworthy of what you promise me. I am a mother, Philippe; but God has appointed, — I think so, at least," she added, blushing, — "that maternity should be, with the creature, a state analogous to that of fructification in the plant. The fruit comes only after the flower. In the flowering the plant is prepared, transformed; for the flowering, according to my idea, is love."

"You are right, Andrée."

"I," continued the young girl, quickly, — "I have known

neither preparation nor transformation; I am an anomaly. I have not loved, I have not desired; my mind and heart are as virginal as my body; and yet, sad prodigy! what I have not desired, what I have not even dreamed of, God sends me, — he who has never given fruit to the tree created to be sterile. Where in me are the aptitudes, the instincts; where are the resources, even? The mother who suffers the pains of confinement knows and understands her lot; I — I know nothing. I tremble at thought; I go to that last day as I would go to the scaffold. Philippe, I am accursed."

"Andrée, sister!"

"Philippe," she resumed vehemently, "do I not well know that I hate that child? Oh, yes! I hate it! I shall remember all my life, if I live, Philippe, the day when for the first time the mortal enemy I bear stirred within me. I shudder yet as I remember how that movement, so sweet to mothers, of the innocent creature kindled in my blood a fever of wrath, and brought blasphemy to my lips, till then so pure. Philippe, I am a bad mother; Philippe I am accursed!"

"In the name of Heaven, dear Andrée, calm yourself. Let not your mind lead your heart astray. That child is your life, your blood; I love it, because it comes from you."

"You love it!" she exclaimed, furious and livid; "you dare to tell me, me, that you love my dishonor and your own! you dare to tell me that you love that memorial of a crime, that representation of the base criminal! Well, Philippe, I am not base, I am not false; I hate the child because it is not my child, and I have not called it. I execrate it because it will, perhaps, resemble its father. Its father! — Oh! I shall die some day in pronouncing that horrible word! My God!" she cried, falling to her knees on the floor, "I cannot kill that child at its birth,

for thou dost give it life. I could not kill myself while I bore it, for thou hast forbidden suicide as well as murder. But I pray thee, I beseech thee, I implore thee, if thou art just, my God, if thou carest for the miseries of this world, if thou hast not decreed that I shall die of despair after having lived in disgrace and tears, — my God, take back that child! My God, kill that child! My God, deliver me! avenge me!" Terrible with rage, and grand in movement, she struck her forehead against the marble chimney-piece in spite of Philippe's efforts, who pressed her in his arms. Suddenly the door opened; the servant returned, conducting the doctor, who at the first glance understood the whole scene.

"Madame," said the doctor, with that professional quiet which always imposes restraint or submission, "do not aggravate the pains of this labor which is now approaching. You," he said to the servant, "prepare everything as I told you on the way. You," speaking to Philippe, "will be more reasonable than Madame, and instead of sharing her fears and her weakness, you will add your encouragements to mine."

Andrée rose almost ashamed. Philippe led her to an armchair. The patient then turned red and threw herself back in a painful convulsion; her clenched hands clung to the fringes of the chair, and the first cry issued from her violet lips.

"That sorrow, that fall, that anger, have hastened the crisis," said the doctor; "withdraw to your chamber, Monsieur de Taverney, and — courage!"

Philippe, with swelling heart, rushed to Andrée, who had heard, who trembled, and who, rising in spite of her pain, threw her arms around her brother's neck. She embraced him closely, kissed his cold cheek, and said in a low voice, "Adieu! adieu! adieu!"

"Doctor! Doctor!" cried Philippe, in despair; "do you hear!"

Louis separated the unhappy couple with gentle force, replaced Andrée in the easy chair, conducted Philippe to his chamber, and bolted the door which separated it from Andrée's room; then closing curtains and doors, he shrouded thus the scene which was about to take place between the physician and the woman, between God and both.

At three o'clock in the morning the doctor opened the door behind which Philippe wept and prayed. "Your sister has given birth to a son," he said.

Philippe clasped his hands.

"Do not come in," said the doctor; "she is asleep."

"She sleeps — Oh, Doctor! is it really true that she sleeps?"

"If it were otherwise, Monsieur, I should say to you: Your sister has given birth to a son, but that son has lost his mother. Look, then."

Philippe put his head through the door.

"Listen to her breathing."

"Yes! oh, yes!" murmured Philippe, embracing the doctor.

"Now, you know that we have engaged a nurse. In passing the Point-du-Jour, where that woman lives, I notified her to be ready. But you alone can bring her; take advantage, then, of the patient's sleep, and set off with the carriage in which I came."

"But you, Doctor, you?"

"I have in the Place Royale a patient very ill with pleurisy. I will finish the night at his bedside."

"The cold, Doctor —"

"I have my cloak."

"The town is not very safe."

"Twenty times in twenty years I have been stopped by

night. I have always replied : 'My friend, I am a physician, on my way to a patient. Do you wish for my cloak? Take it; but do not kill me, for without me my patient may die.' And observe, Monsieur, this cloak has seen twenty years' service. The thieves have always left it to me."

"Good doctor — To-morrow, is it not?"

"To-morrow, at eight o'clock, I shall be here?"

The doctor directed the servant to perform certain services, and bestow careful attention on the patient. He wished the child to be placed by its mother's side. Philippe begged him to remove it, recalling his sister's last words.

Louis therefore placed the child in the servant's chamber, and then departed by way of the Rue Montorgueil, while the carriage took Philippe in the direction of Roule. The servant fell asleep in the easy chair near her mistress.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE ABDUCTION.

In the intervals of the refreshing sleep that follows great fatigue, the mind seems to acquire a double force, — the faculty of appreciating the comfort of the situation, and the faculty of watching over the body in its prostration.

Andrée, returning to a consciousness of life, opened her eyes and saw at her side the sleeping servant. She heard the joyous crackling on the hearth, and wondered at the silence of the chamber where everything was, like herself, in repose. This consciousness was not that of complete wakefulness, nor was it a dream. Andrée took pleasure in prolonging that state of indecision, of soft somnolence; she suffered ideas to spring up one after another in her tired brain, as if she feared the sudden invasion of reason in its completeness. Suddenly a cry, distant, feeble, hardly heard, reached her ear through the thickness of the partition. This noise again produced in Andrée the trembling from which she had suffered so much. It brought back to her that feeling of hatred which for some months had troubled her innocence and her kindness, as a shock disturbs a liquid in a vessel in which dregs are sleeping.

From this moment there was for Andrée no more sleep nor repose; she remembered, — she hated. But the force of sensations is commonly in proportion to corporeal strength. Andrée no longer had the vigor she had mani-

fested in the scene with Philippe the evening before. The cry of the child reached her brain, first as a pain, and then as an annoyance. At length she asked herself if Philippe, in removing that child, with his usual consideration, had not been the executor of a will somewhat cruel.

The thought of the evil we wish to any creature is not so repulsive as the sight of it. Andrée, who execrated that child when an invisible idea, who had even desired its death, was hurt at hearing the unfortunate being cry "He is suffering," she thought. And then she replied to herself, "Why should I be concerned for his sufferings, — I, the most miserable of living creatures?"

The child uttered another cry, louder and more painful. Andrée then perceived that this voice awoke in her, as it were, a troubled voice, and felt her heart drawn as by an invisible chain toward the abandoned, crying child. That of which the young girl had felt the want was now realized in her. Nature had accomplished one of its preparations. Physical pain, that strong tie, had bound the mother's heart to the slightest movement of her child.

"It must not be," thought Andrée, "that this poor orphan cries to Heaven for vengeance against me. God has given to these little creatures, hardly born, the most eloquent of voices. One may kill them, — that is, put them out of suffering; but one has no right to inflict pain upon them. If we had that right, God would not have permitted them to cry so."

Andrée raised her head, and tried to call her servant; but her feeble voice could not arouse the robust peasant. The child had ceased crying.

"Doubtless," thought Andrée, "the nurse has arrived; I heard the noise of the outer door. Yes, some one is moving in the next room; and the little creature no longer cries. The care of a stranger is already extended over it,

and reassures its unformed intelligence. Oh, she, then, is the mother who takes care of the child! For a few crowns the child born of my body will find a mother. And later, passing near me who have suffered so much, near me whose life has produced its own, that child will not look at me; it will say 'mother' to a mercenary more generous in her hired love than I in my just resentment. That shall not be. I have suffered; I have purchased the right to look on the face of that child; I have the right to compel it to love me for my care, to respect me for my sacrifice and my sorrow." She made a more determined effort, summoned all her forces, and called, "Marguerite! Marguerite!"

The servant awoke lazily, and without moving from her easy chair, to which she was bound by a heaviness almost lethargic.

"Do you hear me?" said Andrée.

"Yes, Madame, yes," said Marguerite, coming to her senses. And she approached the bed. "Madame wishes to drink?"

"No."

"Madame perhaps wishes to know what time it is?"

"No, no," replied Andrée, looking steadily at the door of the next chamber.

"Ah, I understand; Madame wishes to know if Monsieur her brother has returned."

Andrée struggled against her desire with all the weakness of a proud soul, with all the energy of a warm and generous heart.

"I wish," she stammered at length, — "I wish — Open that door, Marguerite."

"Yes, Madame — Ah, how cold it is there! The wind, Madame, — what a wind!"

The wind in fact came into Andrée's chamber, and shook the flame of the candles and of the night-lamp.

"It is the nurse, who has left open a door or a window. See, Marguerite, see! That child must be cold."

Marguerite turned toward the adjoining chamber. "I will go and cover him up, Madame," she said.

"No, no!" murmured Andrée, with a feeble and broken voice; "bring it to me."

Marguerite stopped in the middle of the chamber. "Madame," she said softly, "Monsieur Philippe expressly directed the child to be left there, — fearing, no doubt, that Madame might be disturbed or excited."

"Bring me my child!" cried the young mother, with a burst that might have broken her heart; for from her eyes, which had continued dry in the midst of her sufferings, issued tears on which must have smiled, in heaven, the protecting angels of little children.

Marguerite hastened into the chamber. Andrée, sitting up, hid her face in her hands. The servant returned immediately, with a look of stupefaction.

"Well?" said Andrée.

"Well — Madame — some one, then, has come?"

"What, — some one? Who?"

"Madame, the child is no longer there."

"Indeed, I heard a noise a little while ago," said Andrée, — "steps; the nurse must have come while you were asleep, — she did not wish to wake you. But where is my brother? Look in his chamber."

Marguerite ran to Philippe's room. No one there!

"It is strange," said Andrée, anxiously; "can he have gone out again without seeing me?"

"Ah, Madame!" cried the servant.

"What is it?"

"The street-door was just opened."

"Look! look!"

"It is Monsieur Philippe returning. Enter, Monsieur, enter."

Philippe, in fact, entered. Behind him a peasant woman, enveloped in a thick cloak of striped wool, bestowed upon the house that benevolent smile with which the hireling welcomes every new connection.

"Sister, sister, I am here," said Philippe, coming into the chamber.

"Dear brother! what troubles, what sorrows I cause you! Ah, here is the nurse; I was so afraid she had gone —"

"Gone? she has just come."

"Has returned, you mean. No; I heard her plainly a little while ago, softly as she walked."

"I don't understand you, sister; no one —"

"Oh, I thank you, Philippe," said Andrée, drawing him to her, and accenting each word, — "I thank you for having understood me so well that you would not take away that child till I had seen it — kissed it. Philippe, you have well read my heart. Yes, yes; be tranquil, I shall love my child."

Philippe seized Andrée's hand, and covered it with kisses.

"Tell the nurse to restore it to me," added the young mother.

"But, Monsieur," said the servant, "you know well that the child is no longer there."

"What! what are you saying?" replied Philippe.

Andrée looked at her brother with terror in her eyes. The young man ran to the servant's bed; he searched, and finding nothing, uttered a terrible cry. Andrée followed his movements in the mirror. She saw him return, pale, with arms inert; she understood a part of the truth.

and replying like an echo to her brother's cry, she sighed, and fell back unconscious upon the pillow.

Philippe was not prepared either for this new misfortune or for Andrée's great grief. He collected all his forces, and by dint of caresses, consolations, and tears, he recalled her to life.

"My child!" Andrée murmured, — "my child!"

"Let us save the mother!" said Philippe to himself. "Sister, my dear sister, we are all crazy, it seems to me; we forget that the good doctor has taken the child away with him."

"The doctor?" cried Andrée, with the pain of doubt, with the joy of hope.

"Why, yes! why, yes! Ah, why, we lose our senses here!"

"Philippe, you swear to me — "

"Dear sister, you are no more reasonable than I. How do you imagine that that child could have disappeared?" and he forced a laugh which deceived both nurse and servant.

Andrée came to herself. "Yet I heard — " she said.

"What?"

"Steps."

Philippe shuddered. "Impossible!" he said; "you were asleep."

"No, no; I was wide awake! I heard — I heard — "

"Very well, you heard that good doctor, who, returning after my departure, because he feared for the health of that child, took him away. Besides, he had spoken to me about it."

"You reassure me."

"How could it be that I should not reassure you; it is so simple?"

"But then," objected the nurse, "what am I doing here?"

"Sure enough! The doctor is waiting for you at your house."

"Oh!"

"Go to him, then. That Marguerite slept so soundly that she heard nothing of what the doctor said, or else he did not speak to her."

Andrée fell back, more tranquil after that terrible shock. Philippe dismissed the nurse, and gave some directions to the servant. Then taking a lamp he examined carefully the door of the adjoining chamber, found a door of the garden open, saw footprints in the snow, and followed them to the garden-door, where they were lost. "Steps of a man!" he cried. "The child is stolen. Misfortune! misfortune!"

CHAPTER LIX.

THE VILLAGE OF HARAMONT.

Those footsteps in the snow were Gilbert's, who, since his last interview with Balsamo, had followed up his task of surveillance, and had made ready his vengeance. He had spared no pains. By dint of pleasant words and small services he had succeeded in making himself acceptable, even pleasing, to Rousseau's wife. His method was simple. Of the thirty sous a day which Rousseau allowed his copyist, the prudent Gilbert set aside one franc, three times every week, with which he purchased some little present for Thérèse, — a ribbon for her bonnet, a delicacy for the table, or a bottle of cordial. The good lady, sensitive to everything that flattered her taste or her small pride, was now and then gratified by exclamations of Gilbert at table in praise of her culinary skill.

For the Genevan philosopher had succeeded in getting his young protégé admitted to the table; and during the last two months Gilbert, thus favored, had accumulated two louis in his treasury, which slept under his pallet, side by side with Balsamo's twenty thousand francs.

But what a life! What persistency of resolution and of will! Rising at daybreak Gilbert began by examining with his keen eyes the situation of Andrée, that he might discover the least change introduced into the dull and regular life of the recluse. Nothing, then, escaped his observation, — neither the sand of the garden-walks,

where his piercing sight measured Andrée's footprints; nor the folds of the curtains, more or less closely drawn, the opening in which was for him a sure index of Andrée's humor, for on her days of gloom she refused even to see the light of day. Thus Gilbert knew what was going on in her soul, and in the house. He had also learned to interpret all Philippe's movements; and making his inferences with skill, he divined Philippe's purpose when he went out, and what result he brought on his return. He pushed detail so far as to follow Philippe one evening when he went to Versailles to find Doctor Louis. This visit to Versailles had slightly puzzled him; but when, two days later, he saw the doctor stealing furtively into the garden he understood the mystery.

Gilbert knew the dates, and was aware that the time for the realization of all his hopes was at hand. He had taken all the precautions necessary to assure success in an enterprise bristling with difficulties. This was his plan as laid out: the two louis enabled him to hire in the Faubourg Saint Denis a cabriolet with two horses. That carriage was to be at his orders whenever he should need it. He had also explored the suburbs of Paris in a vacation of three or four days which he had taken. During that vacation he had visited a little town of Soissonnais, lying eighteen leagues from Paris, and surrounded by a vast forest. This little town was called Villers-Cotterets. On arriving he had immediately called upon the only notary in the place, Maître Niquet. To him Gilbert presented himself as the son of a great nobleman's intendant. This great nobleman, wishing to do a kindness to the child of one of his peasants, had charged Gilbert to find a nurse for it. In all probability the munificence of the great nobleman would not be limited to the nurse's monthly pay; and besides, he would place in the hands of Maître Niquet a certain sum for the use of the child.

Then Maître Niquet, the father of three fine boys, had mentioned to him the daughter of the nurse of his three sons, who lived in the little village of Haramont, a league from Villers-Cotterets, and who, after being legitimately married in his office, continued the occupation of madame her mother. This honest woman was named Madeleine Pitou, and was the happy mother of a son, four years old, who showed every indication of robust health; besides, she had recently been confined, and consequently would be at Gilbert's service whenever he should bring or send his nursling.

These arrangements having been made, Gilbert, always punctual, had returned to Paris two hours before the expiration of his leave of absence.

Why had Gilbert chosen the little town of Villers-Cotterets, in preference to all others? In this, as in many other matters, he had been guided by the influence of Rousseau, who had once spoken of the forest of Villers-Cotterets as one of the most fertile in existence, and had named three or four villages hidden in that forest like nests in deep foliage. It would be impossible, then, for any one to discover Gilbert's child in one of those villages.

Haramont especially had interested Rousseau, — so much indeed, that he, the misanthrope, the hermit, said again and again: "Haramont is the end of the world; Haramont is the desert; one can live and die there like the birds, — on the branch while he lives, under the leaves when he dies." Gilbert had also heard the philosopher describe the interior of a cottage, lighting up details with the fire of his genius, — from the smile of the nurse to the bleating of the goat; from the appetizing odor of the thick vegetable soup to the perfumes of the wild mulberry and the violet-colored heather.

"I will go there," Gilbert had said; "my child shall

grow up beneath the shades where the master has breathed his wishes and his sighs."

To Gilbert a caprice was an inexorable command, especially when that caprice presented itself in the guise of a moral necessity. His joy, then, was great when Maître Niquet, anticipating his wishes, mentioned Haramont to him as a village that would suit his purposes exactly.

On his return to Paris, Gilbert had given his attention to the cabriolet. It was not handsome, but it was strong, — it was all that he needed. The horses were of heavy build; the postilion was a dull fellow from the stables. But what Gilbert had in mind was to fulfil his intentions, and without awakening any curiosity. His story had not been questioned by Maître Niquet; with his new garments he was of sufficiently good appearance to resemble the son of the intendant of a good family, or the valet, in disguise, of a duke and peer. Nor had his proposition been received with any suspicion by the owner of the cabriolet. It was a period when there was still confidence between the people and gentlemen. Money paid was received in those times with a degree of gratitude and without the asking of questions. Besides, two louis were then worth as much as four are worth to-day; and to-day four louis are good to earn. The proprietor agreed therefore that on two hours' notice his carriage should be at Gilbert's service.

This enterprise had for the young man all the attractiveness which the imagination of poets and that of philosophers, — two fairies very differently clad, — lend to good actions and to good resolutions. To remove the child from its cruel mother, — that is, to plant shame and sorrow in the enemy's camp, — and then with a change of front, to enter the cottage of virtuous villagers, as painted by Rousseau, and deposit on a child's cradle a large sum of

money, to be regarded as a tutelary god by those poor villagers, to pass for a grand personage, — this was more than enough to satisfy pride, resentment, love for neighbors, hatred for enemies.

The fatal day at length arrived. It followed ten other days which Gilbert had spent in anxiety, ten nights in which he had hardly slept. Notwithstanding the severity of the weather he lay with his window open, and every movement of Andrée or of Philippe was repeated in his ear, as the bell answers to the hand that pulls the cord. On this last day he saw Philippe and Andrée talking together near the fireplace; he saw the servant set out hastily for Versailles, forgetting to close the blinds. He ran immediately to notify the owner of the carriage, and waited in front of the stable while they harnessed the horses, biting his hands in the effort to control his impatience. At length the postilion mounted his horse, and Gilbert the cabriolet, which he stopped at the corner of a little deserted street near the market. He then returned to Rousseau's, and wrote a letter of farewell to the good philosopher, and of thanks to Thérèse, announcing that a small inheritance called him to the South, and that he should return, — all without precise information. Then with his money in his pocket and a long knife in his sleeve he was about to slide down the gutter-pipe into the garden, when a sudden idea arrested him. The snow! He had been so occupied that he had not thought of that. On the snow his footprints would be visible. Those footprints, leading from the wall of Rousseau's house would cause Philippe and Andrée to make an investigation, and his disappearance at the very time of the abduction would reveal the whole secret.

It was therefore necessary to go round by way of the Rue Coq-Héron, and enter by the garden-door, a key to which Gilbert had obtained a month previously, and from

which ran a well-beaten path in which his feet would leave no tracks. He lost no time, and arrived while the carriage that had brought Doctor Louis was waiting before the principal entrance of the little hôtel. He opened the door cautiously, saw no one, and went and hid himself in the corner of the pavilion, near the summer-house.

It was a terrible night. He could hear all, — the groans and cries wrested by suffering, even the first wail of the child that was born to him. Meanwhile, leaning against the naked wall, he received, without knowing it, the snow which fell thick and heavy from the darkened sky. His breast beat against the handle of the knife which he pressed despairingly to his breast. His fixed eyes had the color of blood, the glow of fire.

At length the doctor went out; at length Philippe exchanged with the doctor a few last words. Then Gilbert approached the blind, leaving a track on the carpet of snow which, ankle-deep, crackled under his step. He saw Andrée sleeping on her bed, Marguerite dozing in the easy chair, and looking for the child near its mother, he did not see it. He understood immediately and turned toward the entrance. He opened the door, not without making a noise that alarmed him, and finding his way to the bed which had been Nicole's, feeling around he put his icy fingers on the poor child's face, who thereupon uttered the cries which Andrée had heard. Then enveloping the new-born infant in a woollen wrap, he carried it away, leaving the door half-open, to avoid the risk of noise. A minute later he had gained the street by way of the garden; he hastened to his carriage, aroused the postilion whom he found asleep, and closing the leather curtain while the man mounted his horse, he said, —

"A half-louis for you, if in a quarter of an hour we have passed the barrier."

The horses, sharp-shod for ice, started off at a gallop.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PITOU FAMILY.

During the journey everything frightened Gilbert. The noise of the carriages that followed or passed by his own, the moaning of the wind in the dismantled trees, seemed to him sounds of an organized pursuit, or the cries of those from whom the child had been taken. Nothing threatened him, however. The postilion bravely did his duty, and the steaming horses arrived at Dammartin at the time Gilbert had expected, — that is, before the first light of day. Gilbert paid his half-louis, changed horses and postilion, and resumed his journey.

During the first part of the way, the child, carefully sheltered by the covering and shielded by Gilbert himself, had not felt the cold, and had not uttered a single cry. As soon as it was light Gilbert, seeing the country in the distance, felt more courageous, and to drown the cries which the child was beginning to make, he started on one of those everlasting songs which he used to sing at Taverney when he was returning from the chase. The creaking of the axle-tree and the traces, the noise of the iron-work about the carriage, the little bells of the horses, made a diabolical accompaniment, the volume of which the postilion himself increased by mingling with Gilbert's refrain fragments of a *Bourbonnaise* of a character somewhat seditious.

This last driver did not even suspect that Gilbert had a child in the cabriolet. He stopped his horses just before reaching Villers-Cotterets, received the stipulated fare for

his journey, a crown and six francs, and Gilbert, taking up his burden carefully enveloped in the folds of the blanket, singing his song as seriously as possible, quickly moved away, crossed a ditch, and disappeared in a path strewed with leaves, which led to the village of Haramont.

The weather had become very cold. The snow had ceased falling; the ground was hard and bristling with underbrush and thorny bushes. Above could be seen the outlines of the trees of the forests, leafless and gloomy, through whose branches shone the pale blue of a sky still hazy. The keen air, the fragrance of the oaks, the pearls of ice suspended on the ends of the branches, all this freedom, all this poetry excited the young man's imagination. He walked with a rapid and proud step through the little ravine, without stumbling, without looking around; for in the midst of the groups of trees, he took for his guide the steeple of the hamlet and the blue smoke of the chimneys which could be seen through the gray lattice-work of the branches. Within half an hour he crossed a stream bordered with ivy and yellow cress, and asked, at the first cottage, the children of a laborer to direct him to the house of Madeleine Pitou.

Silent and attentive, instead of stupid and inactive like some peasants, the children rose, and staring at the stranger, led him, holding each other by the hand, to a cottage of fair size, of very good appearance, and situated by the banks of a stream which flowed by most of the houses in the village. The limpid waters of this stream were swollen somewhat by the first melting of the snow. A wooden bridge — that is, a large plank — joined the road to the steps of earth that led to the house.

One of the children, his guides, showed Gilbert where Madeleine Pitou lived.

"There?" repeated Gilbert.

The child nodded his head without saying a word.

"Madeleine Pitou?" Gilbert asked the child once more.

The latter having reiterated his silent affirmation, Gilbert crossed the little bridge, and knocked at the door of the cottage; while the children, who had again taken each other's hands, looked with all their might to see what had brought to Madeleine's house this fine gentleman in a brown suit and buckled shoes.

Gilbert, however, had not yet noticed in the village any living creature but these children. Haramont was really the desert so much desired.

As soon as the door was opened, a spectacle full of charm for everybody, but particularly so for a young philosopher, met Gilbert's view. A stout peasant woman was nursing a fine child, a few months old, while kneeling before her, another child, a vigorous boy four or five years of age, was saying his prayer in a loud voice. In a corner by the fireplace, near a window, or rather a hole cut in the wall and closed with glass, another peasant woman, about thirty-five years old, was spinning flax, — her wheel on her right, a wooden stool under her feet, a large poodle on the stool.

The dog, seeing Gilbert, barked in a very hospitable and civil manner, just enough to show his vigilance. The child at prayers turned round, cutting short the utterance of the *Pater*, and the two women uttered a sort of exclamation of surprise mingled with joy.

Gilbert began by smiling at the nurse. "Good dame Madeleine," he said, "I salute you."

The woman started up, "Monsieur knows my name!" she said.

"As you see; but don't let me disturb you, I beg. In fact, instead of one nursling which you have now, you are about to have two;" and he deposited in the homely

cradle of the country child the little city child he had brought.

"Oh, how pretty he is!" exclaimed the woman who was spinning.

"Yes, Sister Angélique, very pretty," said Madeleine.

"Madame is your sister?" said Gilbert, pointing to the spinner.

"My sister, yes, Monsieur," replied Madeleine; "my husband's sister."

"Yes, my aunt Gélique," murmured the little fellow, in a low voice, who joined in the conversation without rising.

"Be still, Ange; be still!" said the mother; "you interrupt Monsieur."

"What I have to propose to you is very simple, good dame. This child is the son of one of my master's tenants, a ruined farmer. My master, godfather to this child, wishes him to be brought up in the country, and become a good workman, with good health and good manners; will you take charge of this child?"

"But, Monsieur —"

"He was born yesterday, and has not yet been nursed," interrupted Gilbert. "Besides, it is the child of which Maître Niquet, notary of Villers-Cotterets, must have spoken to you."

Madeleine immediately seized the child, and gave it the breast with a generous impetuosity which moved Gilbert deeply.

"They did not deceive me," he said; "you are a good woman. I confide to your care this child in the name of my master. I see that he will be happy here, and I hope that he will bring into this cottage a dream of happiness in exchange for that which he will find here. How much a month did you have for the children of Maître Niquet, of Villers-Cotterets?"

"Twelve francs, Monsieur; but Monsieur Niquet is rich, and he added now and then a few francs for sugar and extras."

"Mother Madeleine," said Gilbert, with pride, "for this child you shall be paid twenty francs a month, which makes two hundred and forty francs a year."

"Jesus!" cried Madeleine; "thanks, Monsieur."

"This is for the first year," said Gilbert, laying on the table ten handsome louis, which made the two women stare, and toward which the little Ange stretched his rapacious hand.

"But, Monsieur, if the child should not live?" the nurse objected timidly.

"That would be a great misfortune, — which will not happen," said Gilbert. "You are satisfied with the monthly pay for nursing, then?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur!"

"Let us pass to the payments of an allowance for the other years."

"Will the child remain with us?"

"Probably."

"In that case, Monsieur, we should be his father and mother."

Gilbert turned pale. "Yes," he said, in a suppressed tone.

"Then, Monsieur, this poor little one is abandoned?"

Gilbert was not expecting such emotion, such questions. He composed himself, however. "I have not told you all," he added; "the poor father has died from grief."

The two good women clasped their hands expressively.

"And the mother?" asked Angélique.

"Oh, the mother, the mother!" replied Gilbert, breathing painfully, "no child, born or unborn, can ever count on her."

It was at this point in their conversation that Father Pitou returned from the fields, appearing calm and happy. His was one of those dull and honest natures, full of gentleness and health, which Greuze has represented in his excellent paintings. A few words explained to him the situation. Besides, he comprehended things through pride, especially those things which he did not understand.

Gilbert explained that the allowance of the child was to be paid until he became a man and capable of supporting himself by the use of his mind and his arms.

"Be it so," said Pitou; "I think we shall love this child, he is so pretty."

"He too," said Angélique and Madeleine, — "he thinks as we do."

"Come, then, with me, I beg, to see Maître Niquet; I will deposit with him the necessary money, that you may be satisfied, and the child may be happy."

"Immediately, Monsieur," replied Pitou, rising from his seat.

Then Gilbert took leave of the good women, and approached the cradle in which the new-comer had already displaced the child of the house. He bent over the cradle with a gloomy look, and for the first time noticing the face of his son, he saw that it resembled Andrée. This sight broke his heart; he had to bury his finger-nails in his flesh to restrain a tear which rose from his wounded heart to his eyelid. He placed a timid kiss on the fresh cheek of the newly born, and drew back tottering.

Father Pitou was already on the threshold, a stout stick in his hand, his best coat on his back.

Gilbert gave a half-louis to the chubby Ange Pitou, who crawled between his legs, and the two women requested the honor of embracing him, with the touching familiarity of country people.

This father of eighteen years had been so weighed down with emotions that he was nearly crushed by them. Pale, nervous, he began to grow bewildered.

"Let us go," he said to Pitou.

"As you please, Monsieur," replied the peasant, walking on; and they took their departure.

Suddenly Madeleine cried out from the door. "Monsieur! Monsieur!"

"What is it?" said Gilbert.

"His name! his name! What do you wish him to be called?"

"His name is Gilbert!" replied the young man, with a manly pride.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE DEPARTURE.

At the notary's, the business was soon disposed of. Gilbert deposited, under his own name, a sum of twenty thousand francs, lacking a few hundred, designed to defray the expenses of education and maintenance of the child, and also to establish him in some business when he reached manhood. He allowed for the education and maintenance the sum of five hundred francs a year for fifteen years, and decided that the rest of the money should be set aside for the purchase of some business or a piece of land.

Having thus provided for the child, Gilbert thought of the guardians. He wished that two thousand four hundred francs should be given to Pitou by the boy when he attained the age of eighteen years. Until then Maître Niquet was to pay out annually only five hundred francs. Maître Niquet was to enjoy the use of the money as compensation for his trouble.

Gilbert took a proper receipt for the money from Niquet, and for the child from Pitou, — Pitou witnessing the signature of Niquet, Niquet that of Pitou; so that at about noon Gilbert was ready to take his departure, leaving Niquet in a state of admiration for this precocious wisdom, and Pitou rejoicing in his good fortune.

On leaving the village of Haramont, Gilbert fancied himself separating from the whole world. Nothing had for him now either meaning or promise. He had left

behind the careless life of a young man, and had committed what men call a crime, which perhaps God would severely punish. At the same time, confident in his own strength of mind and body, Gilbert had the courage to tear himself away from Maître Niquet, who had accompanied him, and had taken a great liking to him, and who tempted him by a thousand allurements.

But the mind is capricious; human nature is subject to weaknesses. In proportion as a man has will, spontaneity of action, energy in the execution of his plans, he measures the distance which already separates him from his first step. It is then that the most courageous are alarmed; it is then that they say, like Cæsar, "Have I done well in passing the Rubicon?"

Gilbert, finding himself on the verge of the forest, turned to look once more upon the brown tops of the trees which hid all Haramont except the steeple. This charming picture of happiness and peace plunged him into a revery full of regret and delight.

"Fool that I am!" he said to himself; "where am I going? Will not God turn away in anger in the depths of heaven? What! an idea presented itself to me; what! circumstances favored the accomplishment of that idea; what! a man created by God to cause the wrong which I have done, has consented to repair this wrong, and I find myself to-day possessor of riches and my child! So, with ten thousand francs, ten thousand being reserved for the child, I can live here like a happy husbandman, among these good villagers, in the bosom of this sublime and fruitful Nature. I can bury myself forever in peaceful blessedness, in work and contemplation; I can forget the world, and be forgotten by it; I can — unbounded happiness! — bring up this child myself, and thus enjoy my labor. Why not? Are not these good chances compen-

sation for all my past suffering? Oh, yes; I can live thus! yes, I can share in the division of this money with the child, which, besides, I shall have brought up myself, earning thus the money which would be given to these hirelings. I can confess to Maître Niquet that I am his father; I can do everything." And his heart was filled by degrees with inexpressible joy, and with a hope which he had not yet tasted, even in the most pleasant hallucinations of his dreams.

Suddenly the worm which slumbered at the core of this beautiful fruit awoke, and showed its hideous head; it was remorse, it was shame, it was misery. "I cannot," said Gilbert, turning pale; "I have robbed this woman of her child, as I robbed her of her honor. I have robbed this man of money, to make, I said, reparation. I have, then, no longer the right to use it for my own happiness; I have no longer the right to keep the child, since the mother cannot have it; it belongs to both of us or to neither."

And with these words, painful as wounds, Gilbert rose in despair; his face now expressed the most gloomy, the most hateful of passions. "Well, then," said he, "I will be miserable; I will suffer; I will give up love and fortune; but the portion of good which I should have done, I will turn to evil. My patrimony henceforth is vengeance and misery. Do not fear, Andrée, I will share faithfully with you!" He turned to the right, and after a moment's reflection as to the direction he should take, plunged into the woods, where he walked all day in the direction of Normandy, which he had reckoned on reaching after a four days' journey.

He possessed nine francs and a few sous. His appearance was irreproachable, his face calm and quiet. Carrying a book under his arm, he looked very much like a

student of good family returning to the paternal mansion. He was accustomed to walk at night in the fine roads, and to sleep by day in the fields in the sun's rays. Twice only the wind disturbed him so much that he was obliged to enter a cottage, where, upon a chair by the fireplace, he slept to his heart's content without noticing the approach of night. He always had a pretext and a destination. "I am going to Rouen," he said, "to my uncle's, and I come from Villers-Cotterets; I wished, like other young men, to make a journey on foot by way of amusement."

There was no suspicion on the part of the peasants; at that time a book carried respect with it. If Gilbert saw an expression of doubt upon some more compressed lips, he spoke of a school to which his vocation called him. This quickly dispelled every suspicion. Eight days passed thus, during which Gilbert lived like a peasant, spending ten sous a day and walking ten leagues. He arrived at last at Rouen, and once there, had no need of information, nor of asking his way.

The book which he carried was a copy of "La Nouvelle Héloise," richly bound. Rousseau had given it to him, and had written his name on the first leaf of the book. Gilbert, reduced to four francs ten sous, tore out this leaf, which he carefully preserved, and sold the book to a bookseller for three francs.

Thus the young man was enabled to arrive, three days later, in sight of Havre, and at sunset he beheld the sea. His shoes were in a condition not at all becoming to a young gentleman who daintily put on silk stockings for travelling through the towns. But Gilbert had another idea; he sold his silk stockings, or rather exchanged them, for a pair of shoes of irreproachable stoutness. As to their elegance, we will say nothing.

This last night he passed in Harfleur, lodged and fed for

sixteen sous. There he ate oysters for the first time in his life. "A dish of the rich," he said to himself, "for the poorest of men; so true is it that God has done nothing but good, while men have done the evil, according to the maxim of Rousseau."

At ten o'clock in the morning on the thirteenth of December, Gilbert entered Havre, and the first thing he saw was the "Adonis," a fine brig of three hundred tons, lying in a dock. The wharves were deserted. Gilbert ventured to go on board the brig over a gang-plank. A cabin-boy approached to question him.

"The captain?" said Gilbert.

The boy pointed to the companion-way, and directly a voice from below cried out, "Let him come down."

Gilbert descended. He was led into a small room, constructed of mahogony and furnished with the most quiet simplicity. A man, thirty years old, pale, nervous, with keen and restless eye, was reading a paper upon a table made of mahogany like the walls. "What does Monsieur wish?" he said to Gilbert.

Gilbert made a sign to the man to dismiss his boy, and the boy withdrew.

"You are the captain of the 'Adonis,' Monsieur?" said Gilbert, immediately.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"This note is addressed to you, then?" He handed to the captain Balsamo's note.

Scarcely had he looked at the writing, when the captain rose and said hastily to Gilbert, with a smile full of affability, "Ah, you too? So young? Good! good!"

Gilbert merely bowed.

"You are going?" he said.

"To America."

"You start?"

"I go with you."

"Good. In eight days, then."

"What shall I do in the mean time, Captain?"

"Have you a passport?"

"No."

"Then you must come on board to-night, after having walked all day outside the town, — at Sainte-Adresse, for instance. Do not speak to any one."

"I must eat; I have no money."

"You must dine here; you shall have supper to-night."

"And afterward?"

"Once embarked, you will not again land; you will remain in hiding here. You will depart without looking again at the sky. Once at sea, twenty leagues out, you shall be free as you please."

"Good."

"Finish to-day all that you have to do."

"I have a letter to write."

"Write it on this table; here is pen, ink, and paper. The post-office is in the faubourg; the boy will conduct you."

"Thanks, Captain," and Gilbert, left alone, wrote a short letter upon which he placed this address: "Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney; Paris, Rue Coq-Héron, 9, — the first door beyond the Rue Plastrière." Then he put the letter in his pocket, ate what the captain himself served him, and followed the boy, who conducted him to the post-office, where the letter was mailed.

All day long Gilbert watched the sea from the top of the cliffs. At night he returned. The captain was on the lookout for him, and brought him on board.

CHAPTER LXII.

GILBERT'S LAST FAREWELL.

PHILIPPE had passed a terrible night. Those footprints in the snow were sufficient proof that some one had made his way into the house to carry off the child; but whom could he accuse? There was nothing to fix his suspicions upon any one.

Philippe knew his father so well that he did not doubt his complicity in the affair. Monsieur de Taverney believed Louis XV. to be the father of this child; he would attach great importance to the preservation of this living witness of the king's infidelity to Madame Dubarry. The baron would also believe that, sooner or later, Andrée would be restored to favor, and would wish to regain at any price the principal means of her coming fortune. These reflections, based upon a revelation, still quite fresh, of the paternal character, comforted Philippe somewhat, who thought it possible to recover this child since he knew who had stolen it. He watched therefore for the coming of Doctor Louis at eight o'clock, to whom, as they walked back and forth in the street, he related the frightful event of the night.

The doctor was a man of good judgment; he examined the footprints in the garden, and after consideration decided in favor of Philippe's suppositions. "I know the baron well enough," he said, "to believe him capable of this wicked deed. At the same time, may not some other interest, more immediate, have led to the abduction of this child?"

"What interest, Doctor?"

"That of the real father."

"Oh!" cried Philippe, "for a moment I had this idea; but the miserable man has not even bread for himself. He is a madman, a fanatic, a fugitive by this time, who must be afraid of my very shadow. Let us make no mistake, Doctor. The miserable fellow committed this crime under the temptation of opportunity; but now that I am no longer angry, although I hate this criminal, I think that I shall avoid meeting him, so that I may not kill him. I think he must have feelings of remorse which punish him; I think that hunger and exile will avenge me as efficiently as my sword."

"Let us say no more about it," said the doctor.

"You will, dear and good friend, consent to just one last falsehood; for we must, first of all, reassure Andrée. You will tell her that yesterday you were alarmed about the health of this child; that you returned in the night, and took him to carry him to his nurse. This fiction which I have improvised for Andrée is the first one that presents itself to my mind."

"I will say that; you will, however, seek for this child?"

"I have a plan for finding him. I have decided to leave France. Andrée will enter the monastery of Saint Denis; then I will seek Monsieur de Taverney. I will tell him that I know all; I will make him disclose to me the hiding-place of the child. His resistance I will overcome by threats of public exposure, by threats of intervention on the part of Madame la Dauphine."

"And what will you do with the child, your sister being in the convent?"

"I will place him at nurse with a woman whom you will recommend to me; afterward I will send him to college,

and when he is grown up I will keep him with me, if I live."

"And do you think that the mother will consent to leave either you or her child?"

"Andrée will henceforth consent to anything I wish. She knows that I have approached Madame la Dauphine on the subject, whose promise I have; she will not allow me to be wanting in respect toward our protectress."

"Let us go in to see the poor mother," said the doctor; and he entered the apartment of Andrée, who was sleeping quietly, comforted by Philippe's attentions. Her first word was a question to the doctor, who had already reassured her by his happy expression. She, from that time, became so calm that her convalescence was much accelerated; and ten days later she rose, and could walk in the conservatory when the sun was shining upon the glass.

On the very day of this walk, Philippe, who had been away for some days, returned to the house in the Rue Coq-Héron with a face so gloomy that the doctor, on opening the door for him, divined some great misfortune.

"What is the matter, then? Does your father refuse to restore the child?"

"My father," said Philippe, "has been seized with an attack of fever, which confined him to his bed three days after his departure from Paris, and he was very low when I arrived. I looked upon all this sickness as a trick, as a pretence, as a proof even of his complicity in the abduction. I insisted, I threatened; but Monsieur de Taverney swore to me by the Christ that he understood nothing I said to him."

"So you return to Paris without having obtained any intelligence?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"And convinced of the baron's veracity?"

"Almost convinced."

"More artful than you, he has not disclosed his secret."

"I threatened him with the intervention of Madame la Dauphine, and the baron turned pale. 'Ruin me if you like,' he said; 'bring dishonor upon your father and yourself; it will be an egregious folly without any result. I do not know what you mean.'"

"So that —"

"So that I return in despair."

At this moment Philippe heard his sister's voice saying, "Has not Philippe returned?"

"Great God! here she is! What shall I say to her?" murmured Philippe.

"Silence!" said the doctor.

Andrée entered the room, and embraced her brother with a joyous tenderness which chilled the young man's heart.

"Well," she said, "where do you come from?"

"I come from my father, in the first place, as I told you."

"Monsieur le Baron is well?"

"Yes, Andrée; but that was not the only visit I have made. I have seen several persons respecting your entrance at Saint Denis. Thank God, everything is now ready; you are saved, you can think of your future with intelligence and firmness."

Andrée approached her brother and with a tender smile, "Dear friend," she said, "my future no longer concerns me; neither must my future trouble any one. The future of my child is all to me, and I shall consecrate myself solely to the son God has given me. This is my resolution, irrevocably taken, since, with the return of my strength, I can no longer doubt the steadiness of my

mind. To live for my son, to suffer privation, to labor even, if necessary, but never to leave him, day or night, — such is the future I have laid out for myself. No more convent, no more egotism; I belong to some one; God no longer wants me!"

The doctor looked at Philippe as if to say: "Well, what did I predict?"

"My sister," cried the young man, "what are you saying?"

"Do not blame me, Philippe, this is no caprice of a weak and vain woman; I will not incommode you. I will impose nothing upon you."

"But — but, Andrée, I cannot remain in France; I wish to leave everything. I have no longer any fortune; no longer any future. I might consent to abandon you at the foot of an altar, but in the world, in the midst of toil, — Andrée, take care!"

"I have considered everything. I love you sincerely, Philippe; but if you leave me, I will restrain my tears, and take refuge near the cradle of my son."

The doctor approached. "This is extravagance, madness," he said.

"Ah, Doctor, what would you have? It is a state of madness to be a mother, but God sent me this madness. So long as this child needs me I shall persist in my resolution."

Philippe and the doctor exchanged glances.

"My child," said the doctor, "I am not a very eloquent preacher; but I think I remember that God forbids too strong an attachment to any creature."

"Yes, sister," added Philippe.

"God does not forbid a mother's strong love for her son, I think, Doctor."

"Pardon me, my child. For every law that comes from God, search out, not the moral cause alone, but also the

material cause. God forbids a mother to love her child to excess, because the child is a frail, delicate plant, exposed to all misfortunes, to all sufferings; and because to love intensely an ephemeral creature is to expose one's self to despair."

"Doctor," murmured Andrée, "why do you say this to me? And you, Philippe, why are you regarding me with this compassion, this paleness?"

"Dear Andrée," interrupted the young man, "follow my advice. Your health is re-established; enter as soon as possible the convent of Saint Denis."

"I! I have told you that I will not leave my son."

"So long as he shall have need of you," said the doctor, gently.

"My God!" cried Andrée, "what is it? Speak! Something sad, cruel?"

"Be careful," the doctor whispered in Philippe's ear; "she is too weak to bear a decided blow."

"Brother, you do not answer; explain yourself."

"Dear sister, you know that on my return I passed through Point-de-Jour, where your child is at nurse."

"Yes, well?"

"Well, the child was somewhat ill."

"Ill! that dear child! Quick, Marguerite; Marguerite, a carriage! I am going to see my child!"

"Impossible!" cried the doctor; "you are not in a condition to go out, or to bear the motion of a carriage."

"You told me this morning that this was possible; you told me that to-morrow on Philippe's return, I should go to see the poor little one."

"I thought you would be stronger than you are."

"Are you deceiving me?"

The doctor remained silent.

"Marguerite!" repeated Andrée, "obey me; a carriage!"

"But it may kill you," interrupted Philippe.

"Well, let it kill me! I do not care so very much for life."

Marguerite waited, regarding in turn her mistress, her master, and the doctor.

"Come! when I command!" cried Andrée, whose cheeks suddenly reddened.

"Dear sister!"

"I will hear nothing more; and if you refuse me a carriage, I will go on foot."

"Andrée," said Philippe, suddenly, "you will not go; no, there is no need of your going."

"My child is dead!" said the young girl, coldly, letting her hands fall over the sides of the chair in which Philippe and the doctor had seated her.

Philippe answered only by kissing one of her cold and listless hands. By degrees Andrée's neck lost its rigidity; her head drooped on her bosom, and she shed copious tears.

"God has willed," said Philippe, "that we should submit to this new misfortune, — God, who is so great, so just, who may have other plans for you, who judged, no doubt, that the presence of this child at your side would be a punishment undeserved."

"But yet," sighed the poor mother, "why has God made this innocent creature suffer?"

"God has not made him suffer, my child," said the doctor; "he died on the very night of his birth. Have no more regret for him than for a shadow that comes and goes."

"The cries that I heard?"

"Were his farewell to life."

Andrée hid her face in her hands, while the two men, expressing their thought in an eloquent look, congratulated themselves on their pious lie.

Suddenly Marguerite entered with a letter addressed to Andrée in the following manner: "Mademoiselle Andrée de Taverney, Paris, Rue Coq-Héron, — the first door beyond the Rue Plastrière."

Philippe showed the letter to the doctor over Andrée's head, who was no longer weeping, but was absorbed in her grief. "Who could have written it?" he thought. "No one knew her address, and it is not our father's writing."

"Here, Andrée," said Philippe, "is a letter for you."

Without thinking, without hesitating, without surprise, Andrée tore open the envelope, and wiping her eyes, unfolded the paper to read; but she had scarcely run over the lines which composed this letter when she uttered a loud cry, rose up like a mad woman, and with a terrible contraction of her arms and feet fell, heavy as a statue, into the arms of Marguerite who was standing near.

Philippe picked up the letter and read, —

AT SEA, December 15, 17 —

I go, driven away by you, and you will not see me again; but I carry away my child, which shall never call you mother!

GILBERT.

Philippe crushed the paper, with a roar of anger. "Oh!" he said, grinding his teeth, "I had almost pardoned the crime committed on the spur of temptation; but this deliberate crime shall be punished. Over your lifeless head, Andrée, I swear to kill the miserable fellow the first time I meet him. God will permit me to meet him, for he has filled the measure to the brim. Doctor, will Andrée recover?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Doctor, Andrée must enter the monastery of Saint Denis to-morrow; by the day after to-morrow I must be at the nearest seaport. The villain has fled, I will follow him. Besides, I must have this child. Doctor, which is the nearest seaport?"

"Havre."

"I will be at Havre in thirty-six hours," replied Philippe.

CHAPTER LXIII.

ON BOARD.

From that moment Andrée's house was dull and silent as a tomb.

The knowledge that her son was dead would perhaps have killed Andrée. It would have been one of those heavy, abiding sorrows which perpetually undermine. Gilbert's letter was a blow so violent that it aroused all the aggressive force and feeling that still remained in Andrée's generous soul. Coming to herself, she looked at Philippe, and the wrath which she read in his eyes was a new source of courage for herself. She remained silent until her strength was so far recovered that her voice would not tremble, and then, taking Philippe's hand, "My friend," she said, "you spoke to me this morning of the monastery of Saint Denis, in which a cell has been granted me by Madame la Dauphine?"

"Yes, Andrée."

"You will conduct me thither to-day, if you please."

"Thanks, sister."

"To you, Doctor," Andrée continued, "for so many kindnesses a word of thanks would be a barren recompense. Your recompense, Doctor, cannot be found on earth." She went to him and kissed him. "This little medallion," she said, "contains my portrait, which my mother caused to be made when I was two years old. It should resemble my son. Keep it, Doctor, and let it speak to you sometimes of the child whom you have ushered into life, and of the mother whom your care has saved."

Having spoken thus, Andrée, without giving way to emotion, made her preparations for the change, and at six o'clock in the evening she passed through the wicket-door of the parlor of Saint Denis, before the bars of which Philippe, unable to control his emotions, uttered within himself a farewell, perhaps eternal.

Poor Andrée's fortitude suddenly left her. She turned and ran back to her brother with outstretched arms; he also extended his arms toward her. They met, notwithstanding the cold barrier of bars between them, and their tears were mingled on their burning cheeks.

"Adieu! adieu!" murmured Andrée, whose grief burst forth in sobs.

"Adieu!" replied Philippe, stifling his despair.

"If you ever find my son," said Andrée, in a low voice, "do not let me die till I have embraced him."

"Be assured. Adieu! adieu!"

Andrée tore herself from her brother's arms, and supported by a lay sister went forward, constantly looking back at him as he stood in the deep shadow. So long as he could see her he made signs to her with his head and by shaking his handkerchief. At length he received a last farewell, which she sent to him from the end of the dim passage-way. Then an iron gate fell between them with a melancholy sound, and all was over.

Philippe took post at Saint Denis; with his portmanteau behind him he journeyed all that night, all the following day, and in the evening arrived at Havre. He slept at the first hostelry he found, and at daybreak the next day was out on the wharves inquiring about the earliest departures for America. He learned that the brig "Adonis" would sail that very day for New York. He sought out the captain, who was finishing his preparations, and on paying the price for the passage was admitted as a

passenger. Then, having written a last letter to Madame la Dauphine, declaring his respectful devotion and his gratitude, he sent his baggage on board, and himself embarked at the time of high tide.

Four o'clock was striking in the tower of François I. when the "Adonis" left the channel under foresail and topsails. The sea was of a sombre blue, the sky red on the horizon. Philippe, leaning on the railing, after having saluted the few passengers, his travelling companions, stood gazing at the coast of France, which gradually became embrowned with a purplish smoke, as the brig, unfurling more sail, moved rapidly to the right and gained the open sea. Very soon the shore of France, fellow-passengers, and the ocean disappeared; dark night had covered all with its extended wings. Philippe went to his little cabin to read over the copy of his letter to the dauphiness, which might serve for a prayer addressed to the Creator, as well as for a farewell addressed to a fellow-creature. Philippe had written as follows: —

MADAME, — A man without hope and without support withdraws himself from you with regret at having done so little for your future Majesty. He goes to encounter the storms and tempests of the sea while you remain amid the troubles and dangers of government. Young, beautiful, adored, surrounded by respectful friends and idolizing servants, you will forget him whom your royal hand has condescended to lift above the crowd. But I shall never forget you. I am going to a new world to study the means of serving you more effectively upon your throne. I leave to you my sister, poor abandoned flower, who will have no other sun than the light of your countenance. Deign sometimes to condescend to her; and in the midst of your joy, of your omnipotence, in the chorus of unanimous devotion, listen, I beseech you, to the benediction of an exile who will no longer hear you, and perhaps will never see you again.

After reading this letter Philippe's heart was oppressed. The melancholy sound of the groaning vessel and the rush of the waves which broke against the prow made a combination of noises which would have saddened the happiest imaginations. The night was long and painful to the young man. A visit which the captain made him in the morning did not restore him to a satisfactory state of mind. That officer informed him that the greater part of the passengers feared the sea and confined themselves to their berths, and that the passage promised to be short, but disagreeable, owing to the violence of the wind.

Philippe fell into the custom of dining with the captain, and having breakfast served in his cabin; and not finding himself well-hardened against the inconveniences of a sea-voyage, he acquired the habit of spending some hours on the deck reclining on his large military cloak. The rest of the time he employed in planning his future course, and in supporting his mind by solid reading. Sometimes he met his fellow-passengers. There were two ladies on their way to take possession of an inheritance in North America, and four men, one of whom, already old, had with him two sons. These were the cabin passengers. On the other side Philippe once noticed some men of an appearance and bearing more common; he found nothing there to occupy his attention.

In proportion as habit diminished his suffering, Philippe recovered his serenity. Some fine days, clear and free from storms, announced to the passengers the approach to temperate latitudes. Then they remained longer on deck; then, in the night, Philippe, who had concealed his name even from the captain, that he might not have to talk on any subject he dreaded to approach, — Philippe heard, in his cabin, steps over his head; he even heard the voice of the captain, who doubtless was walking

with a passenger. It was a reason why he should not go up. He therefore opened his port-hole, to breathe a little fresh air, and waited for the morning.

Once only during the night, hearing neither voices nor footsteps, he ascended to the deck. The night was warm, the sky clouded, and in the wake of the vessel were seen, springing up in whirls, thousands of phosphorescent atoms. The night apparently had seemed to the passengers too dark and too stormy; for Philippe saw no one on the stern-deck. But forward, on the bow and leaning against the mast of the bowsprit, motionless in sleep or meditation, was a dark figure, which in the dim light Philippe could hardly distinguish, — doubtless some second-class passenger, some poor exile looking forward to the arrival in America, while Philippe himself was regretting the departure from France.

Philippe contemplated that motionless passenger a long time; then feeling the cold of the early morning, he prepared to return to his cabin. Meantime the passenger at the prow gazed at the sky, which began to grow light. Philippe heard the captain coming, and turned round. "You are taking the morning air, Captain?" he said.

"Monsieur, I am just out of bed."

"You have been anticipated by some of your passengers, as you see."

"By you; but officers are, like sailors, early birds."

"Oh, not by me, only!" said Philippe. "See, yonder, that man who meditates so profoundly; he also is one of your passengers, is he not?"

The captain looked and appeared to be surprised.

"Who is that man?" asked Philippe.

"A — merchant," said the captain, with hesitation.

"Who is running after a fortune?" murmured Philippe. "This brig goes too slowly for him."

The captain, instead of replying, went forward to the passenger, and spoke to him, and Philippe saw him disappear down the companion-way.

"You have disturbed his meditations," said Philippe to the captain, who rejoined him. "He did not annoy me, however."

"No, Monsieur, I warned him that the morning cold is dangerous in these latitudes. Passengers of the second-class have not good cloaks, like you."

"Where are we, Captain?"

"Monsieur, to-morrow we shall see the Azore Islands, at one of which we will take in a little fresh water, for it is very warm."

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE AZORE ISLANDS.

THE next day, as the captain had predicted, the passengers could see islands in the northeast, far off under the dazzling sun. They were the Azores. The wind was fair, and the brig made good progress. Toward three o'clock they were near enough for a complete view. When they had approached within the distance of a cannon-shot from the nearest island, the brig was brought up into the wind, and the crew prepared to go ashore for some barrels of fresh water, as the captain had promised. All the passengers welcomed the pleasure of a trip to the shore. To place the feet on solid ground after twenty days and nights of painful navigation is a sort of pleasure which those only can appreciate who have made a long voyage.

"Gentlemen," said the captain to the passengers who he thought were undecided, "you have five hours for a trip to the shore. Take advantage of the opportunity. You will find on that little island, entirely uninhabited, springs of ice-water for you who are naturalists, and rabbits and red partridges for you who are sportsmen."

Philippe took his gun and ammunition. "But, Captain," said he, "do you remain on board? Why do you not come with us?"

"Because yonder," replied the captain, pointing out to sea, "comes a vessel of suspicious appearance, — a vessel which has followed me for four days. I wish to see what she means to do."

Philippe, satisfied with the explanation, got into the last boat and started for the shore. The ladies and several other passengers, of both classes, did not care to take the chances of the trip, or awaited their turn. The two boats then moved away, carrying joyous sailors, and passengers more joyous still.

The captain's last words were: "At eight o'clock, gentlemen, the last boat will go for you. Consider that as settled; those who are behind time will be left."

When all the party, naturalists and sportsmen, had landed, the sailors immediately entered a cavern, situated about a hundred paces from the shore, and which turned at a right angle near the entrance, as if to avoid the rays of the sun. From a living spring, clear, bluish water glided over the mossy rocks, and was lost in fine sand within the cavern. Here the sailors stopped and filled their casks, which then they rolled toward the shore.

Philippe watched them at their work. He admired the tinted shades of the cavern, and the freshness and gentle noise of the water as it glided from fall to fall. He was surprised at finding at first dense darkness and intense cold, while after a few minutes the temperature became mild, and the darkness was pierced by a soft, mysterious light. Thus with arms outstretched and knocking against the rocky sides, he had begun to follow the sailors without seeing them; and then by degrees every face, every form, became clear and distinct. Philippe preferred, as to clearness, the light of that grotto to the light of heaven, so glaring and harsh in full day in those latitudes. Meantime he heard the voices of his companions die away in the distance. One or two gunshots echoed along the mountain; then all noises ceased, and Philippe was alone. The sailors had accomplished their task, and would not return to the grotto.

Philippe yielded himself to the charm of that solitude and to the thoughts whirling in his brain. He stretched himself out upon the soft, luxurious sand, with his back against the rocks carpeted with aromatic herbs, and sank into meditation. The hours rolled on. He had forgotten the world. At his side his gun, unloaded, leaned against the rock, and that he might lie more comfortably, he had taken from his pockets the pistols which were his inseparable companions. All his past life came up before him, slowly, solemnly, as a warning or a reproach; all his future took flight before him, like the timid bird which one may touch with a look, but never with the hand.

While Philippe thus dreamed, doubtless others, within a hundred feet of him, dreamed, laughed, and hoped. He had an insensible perception of that movement, and more than once he thought he heard the boatmen's oars as they conveyed passengers to the vessel or brought other passengers to the shore, — the former surfeited with the day's pleasures, the latter eager to enjoy them in their turn. But his meditation had not yet been disturbed, — either because the entrance to the grotto had escaped notice, or because those who observed it disdained to enter.

Suddenly a shadow, timid, undecided, interposed itself between the light of day and the grotto, at its very entrance. Philippe saw some one walking, with his hands extended before him, and his head bent down, in the direction of the murmuring water. This person fell once against the rocks, his foot having slipped on some herbs. Then Philippe rose and went forward, offering his hand to the visitor to help him find a safe path. In this courteous action his fingers touched the hand of the traveller in the darkness. "This way," he said, with politeness; "Monsieur, the water is in this direction."

At the sound of that voice the stranger quickly raised

his head, and prepared to answer, exposing his face in the azure twilight of the grotto. But Philippe, with a sudden cry of horror, started back. The unknown also drew back with an exclamation of fright.

"Gilbert!"

"Philippe!"

These two words burst forth at the same time, like subterranean thunder. Then ensued the sound of a sort of struggle. Philippe had seized with both hands his enemy's throat and dragged him to the depths of the cavern. Gilbert suffered himself to be dragged, without uttering a word of protest. Pushed against the rocky wall of the interior, he could recoil no farther.

"Scoundrel! I have you at last!" roared Philippe. "God has delivered you into my hands; God is just."

Gilbert was very pale, but made no movement; his arms hung idly by his sides.

"Oh, coward and villain!" said Philippe; "he has n't even the instinct of the wild beast, which defends itself."

But Gilbert replied in gentle tones, "Defend myself! and why?"

"True, you know well that you are in my power; you know well that you have deserved the most terrible punishment. All your crimes are proved. You have loaded a woman with shame; you have killed her by cruelty. It was not enough for you to dishonor a virgin; you wished also to assassinate a mother!"

Gilbert made no reply. Philippe, who gradually became wild with the heat of his own fury, again raised violent hands against Gilbert. The young man offered no resistance.

"You are not a man, then?" said Philippe, shaking him in his rage; "you have only the face of a man?

What! — not even resistance? But I am strangling you, — you see it plainly. Resist, then; defend yourself, coward! coward! assassin!"

Gilbert felt the sharp fingers of his enemy in his throat. He drew himself up, stiffened himself, and vigorous as a lion, by a single movement of his shoulders cast Philippe off from him. Then he crossed his arms. "You see," said he, "that I could defend myself if I wished; but why should I? Now you run to your gun. I would rather be killed at once than torn by finger-nails and crushed by shameful blows."

Philippe had, in fact, seized his gun, but at these words he laid it aside. "No," he murmured. Then, aloud, "Where are you going? How are you here?"

"I embarked in the 'Adonis.'"

"You hid yourself, then? you saw me?"

"I did not even know you were on board."

"You lie!"

"I do not lie."

"How is it that I have not seen you?"

"Because I have left my berth only at night."

"You see! — you hide yourself!'

"Certainly."

"From me?"

"No, I tell you; I go to America on a mission, and I must not be seen. The captain has lodged me apart for that reason."

"You hide yourself, I tell you, to conceal from me your presence, and especially to hide the child which you have stolen."

"The child?" said Gilbert.

"Yes; you have stolen and carried away that child, to make of him a weapon by which some day you may profit, villain!"

Gilbert shook his head. "I have taken the child," he said, "so that no one may teach him to despise or to deny his father."

Philippe paused for a moment. "If that is true," said he, "if I could believe it, you would be less villanous than I thought; but you have stolen, — why have you not denied it?"

"Stolen? I have stolen?"

"You have stolen the child."

"He is my son! he is mine! We do not steal, Monsieur, when we take our own."

"Listen!" said Philippe, trembling with rage. "Just now I thought I would kill you. I had sworn it; I had the right to do it."

Gilbert did not answer.

"Now God enlightens me. God has thrown you in my way as if to say to me: 'Vengeance is useless; vengeance is right only when one is abandoned by God.' I will not kill you, I will only destroy the structure of misery you have erected. This child is your means of mischief for the future; you must give me this child."

"But I have him not," said Gilbert. "One does not take to sea a child fifteen days old."

"You must have procured a nurse for him; why did you not bring away the nurse?"

"I tell you that I have not brought away the child."

"Then you have left him in France. In what part have you left him?"

Gilbert was silent.

"Answer! where have you placed him at nurse, and with what means of support?"

Gilbert was silent.

"Ah, scoundrel, you defy me!" said Philippe. "Are you not afraid of arousing my anger? Will you tell me

where my sister's child is hidden? Will you give me this child?"

"My child is my own," murmured Gilbert.

"Villain! you see plainly that you will die!"

"I will not give up my child."

"Gilbert, listen; I speak to you kindly. Gilbert, I will try to forget the past; I will try to pardon you. Gilbert, you understand my generosity, do you not? I pardon you! I forgive all the shame and misfortune you have brought upon our house; it is a great sacrifice. Give me back this child. Would you have more? Would you have me try to overcome the so justifiable repugnance of Andrée? Would you have me intercede for you? Well, I will do it if you give me back this child! One word more: Andrée loves her son — your son — madly; she will be moved by your repentance, I promise you. But give me back this child, Gilbert, give it back to me!"

Gilbert folded his arms, fixing upon Philippe a glance of gloomy determination. "You have not believed me," he said; "I do not believe you. Not that you are a dishonest man, but because I have sounded the depth of the prejudice of caste. There is no possible return, — no more pardon! We are mortal enemies. You are the stronger, therefore be the conqueror. I do not ask you for your weapon, do not ask me for mine."

"You confess, then, that it is a weapon?"

"Against scorn, yes; against ingratitude, yes; against insult, yes!"

"Once more, Gilbert," said Philippe, foaming at the mouth, "will you?"

"No."

"Take care!"

"No."

"I do not wish to murder you; I wish you to have the chance of killing Andrée's brother. One crime more! Ah, ah! that is tempting. Take this pistol; here is another. Let us each count three and fire," and he threw one of the pistols at Gilbert's feet.

The young man stood motionless. "A duel," he said, "is precisely what I refuse."

"You prefer to have me kill you!" cried Philippe, mad with rage and despair.

"I prefer to be killed by you."

"Reflect. I am beside myself."

"I have reflected."

"It is my right; God will absolve me."

"I know it, — kill me."

"For the last time, will you fight?"

"No."

"You refuse to defend yourself?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, die like a villain of whom I rid the earth! die like a heathen, die like a thief, die like a dog!" and Philippe discharged his pistol at Gilbert, almost touching him with the muzzle. The latter stretched out his arms, swayed first backward, then forward, and fell upon his face without uttering a cry. Philippe felt the sand under his feet wet with the warm blood; he completely lost his senses, and rushed out of the cavern. Before him was the shore; a boat was waiting. Eight o'clock had been announced as the hour of departure; it was now some minutes after eight.

"Ah, here you are, Monsieur!" said the sailors. "You are the last; every one is on board. What have you killed?"

Philippe, hearing this word, lost consciousness. They took him on board the ship, which was unfurling its sails.

"Is every one on board?" asked the captain.

"Here is the last passenger," replied the sailors. "He must have had a fall, for he has fainted."

The captain gave the necessary orders, and the brig sailed rapidly away from the Azores, at the same time that the unknown vessel, which had annoyed them so long, entered the harbor under the American flag.

The captain of the "Adonis" exchanged signals with this vessel, and reassured, apparently at least, he continued his course toward the west, and was soon lost in the darkness of night.

It was not until the next day that they discovered that one passenger was missing.

EPILOGUE.

On the ninth of May, 1774, at eight o'clock in the evening, Versailles presented a most curious and interesting spectacle.

From the first day of the month the king, Louis XV., attacked with a malady, the serious nature of which his physicians at first dared not confess to him, had been confined to his bed, anxiously consulting the countenances of those who surrounded him, to discover in them some reflection of the truth or some ray of hope.

The physician Bordeu had pronounced the king suffering from an attack of small-pox of the most malignant nature, and the physician La Martinière, who had agreed with his colleague as to the nature of the king'scomplaint, gave it as his opinion that his Majesty should be informed of the real state of the case, in order that, both spiritually and temporally, as a king and as a Christian, he might take measures for his own safety and that of his kingdom. "His most Christian Majesty," said he, "should have extreme unction administered to him."

La Martinière represented the party of the dauphin,—the opposition. Bordeu asserted that the bare mention of the serious nature of the disease would kill the king, and said that for his part he would not be a party to such regicide.

Bordeu represented Madame Dubarry's party. In fact, to call in the aid of the Church to the king was to expel

the favorite. When God enters at one door, it is full time for Satan to make his exit by the other.

In the mean time, during all these intestine divisions of the faculty, of the royal family, and of the different parties of the court, the disease took quiet possession of the aged, corrupt, and worn-out frame of the king, and set up such a strong position that neither remedies nor prescriptions could dislodge it.

From the first symptoms of the attack, Louis beheld his couch surrounded by his two daughters, the favorite, and the courtiers whom he especially delighted to honor. They still laughed and stood firm by one another.

Suddenly the austere and ominous countenance of Madame Louise of France appeared at Versailles. She had left her cell to give to her father, in her turn, the cares and consolations he so much required. She entered, pale and stern as a statue of Fate. She was no longer a daughter to a father, a sister to her fellow-sisters; she rather resembled those ancient prophetesses who in the evil day of adversity poured in the startled ears of kings the boding cry, "Woe! woe! woe!" She fell upon Versailles like a thunder-shock at the very hour when it was Madame Dubarry's custom to visit the king, who kissed her white hands, and pressed them in soft caresses to his aching brow and burning cheeks. At sight of her all fled. The sisters, trembling, sought refuge in a neighboring chamber. Madame Dubarry bent the knee and hastened to her apartment; the privileged courtiers retreated in disorder to the antechambers; the two physicians alone remained standing by the fireside.

"My daughter!" murmured the king, opening his eyes, heavy with pain and fever.

"Yes, Sire," said the princess, "your daughter."

"And you come —"

"To remind you of God!"

The king raised himself in an upright posture and attempted to smile.

"For you have forgotten God," resumed Madame Louise.

"I!"

"And I wish to recall him to your thoughts."

"My daughter, I am not so near death, I trust, that your exhortations need to be so very urgent. My illness is very slight, — a slow fever, attended with some inflammation."

"Your malady, Sire," interrupted the princess, "is that which, according to etiquette, should summon around your Majesty's couch all the great prelates of the kingdom. When a member of the royal family is attacked with small-pox, the rites of the Church should be administered without loss of time."

"Madame!" exclaimed the king, greatly agitated, and becoming deadly pale, "what is that you say?"

"Madame!" broke in the terrified physicians.

"I repeat," continued the princess, "that your Majesty is attacked with the small-pox."

The king uttered a cry.

"The physicians did not tell me so," he replied.

"They had not the courage. But I look forward to another kingdom for your Majesty than the kingdom of France. Draw near to God, Sire, and solemnly review your past life."

"The small-pox!" muttered Louis; "a fatal disease! — Bordeu! — La Martinière! — can it be true?"

The two practitioners hung their heads.

"Then I am lost!" said the king, more and more terrified.

"All diseases can be cured, Sire," said Bordeu, taking

the initiative, "especially when the patient preserves his composure of mind."

"God gives peace to the mind and health to the body," replied the princess.

"Madame," said Bordeu, boldly, although in a low voice, "you are killing the king!"

The princess deigned no reply. She approached the sick monarch, and taking his hand, which she covered with kisses, "Break with the past, Sire," said she, "and give an example to your people. No one warned you; you ran the risk of perishing eternally. Promise solemnly to live a Christian life if you are spared; die like a Christian if God calls you hence."

As she concluded she imprinted a second kiss on the royal hand, and with slow step took her way through the antechambers. There she let her long black veil fall over her face, descended the staircase with a grave and majestic air, and entered her carriage, leaving behind her a stupefaction and terror which cannot be described.

The king could not rouse his spirits, except by dint of questioning his physicians; but the blow had been struck. "I do not wish," said he, "that the scenes of Metz with the Duchesse de Châteauroux should be re-enacted here. Send for Madame d'Aiguillon, and request her to take Madame Dubarry with her to Rueil."

This order was equivalent to an expulsion. Bordeu attempted to remonstrate, but the king ordered him to be silent. Bordeu, moreover, saw his colleague ready to report all that passed to the dauphin, and well aware what would be the issue of the king's malady, he did not persist; but going out from the royal chamber he proceeded to acquaint Madame Dubarry with the blow which had just fallen on her fortunes.

The countess, terrified at the ominous and insulting

expression which she saw already on every face around her, hastened to withdraw. In an hour she was without the walls of Versailles, seated beside the Duchesse d'Aiguillon, who, like a trustworthy and grateful friend, was taking the disgraced favorite to her chateau of Rueil, which had descended to her from the great Richelieu.

Bordeu, on his side, shut the door of the king's chamber against all the royal family, under pretext of contagion. Louis's apartment was thenceforward walled up; no one might enter but Religion and Death.

The king had the last rites of the Church administered to him that same day, and this news soon spread through Paris, where the disgrace of the favorite was already known, and circulated from mouth to mouth.

All the court hastened to pay their respects to the dauphin, who closed his doors and refused to see any one.

But the following day the king was better, and sent the Duc d'Aiguillon to carry his compliments to Madame Dubarry. This day was May 9, 1774.

The court deserted the pavilion occupied by the dauphin, and flocked in such crowds to Rueil, where the favorite was residing, that since the banishment of Monsieur de Choiseul to Chanteloup such a string of carriages had never been witnessed.

Things were in this position, therefore: would the king live, and Madame Dubarry still remain queen; or would the king die, and Madame Dubarry sink to the condition of an infamous and execrable courtesan? This was why Versailles, on the evening of May 9, in the year 1774, presented such a curious and interesting spectacle.

On the Place d'Armes, before the palace, several groups of persons had formed in front of the railing who seemed affected and anxious to hear the news. They were citizens of Versailles or of Paris, and every now and then,

with all the politeness imaginable, they questioned the guards who were pacing slowly up and down the Court of Honor, with their hands behind their backs, respecting the king's health.

Gradually these groups dispersed. The inhabitants of Paris took their seats in the stage-coaches to return peaceably to their own homes; while those of Versailles, sure of having the earliest news from the fountain-head, also retired to their several dwellings. No one was to be seen in the streets but the patrols of the watch, who performed their duty a little more quietly than usual; and that gigantic world, called the Palace of Versailles, became by degrees shrouded in darkness and silence, like that greater world which contained it.

At the angle of the street bordered with trees which extends in front of the palace, a man advanced in years was seated on a stone-bench overshadowed by the already leafy boughs of the horse-chestnuts, with his expressive and poetic features turned toward the chateau, leaning with both hands on his cane, and supporting his chin on his hands. He was an old man, bent by age and ill-health, but his eye still sparkled with something of its youthful fire, and his thoughts glowed even more brightly than his eyes. He was absorbed in melancholy contemplation, and did not perceive a second personage who, after peeping curiously through the iron railing and questioning the guards, crossed the esplanade in a diagonal direction, and advanced straight toward the bench with the intention of seating himself upon it.

This personage was a young man with projecting cheek-bones, low forehead, aquiline nose slightly bent to one side, and a sardonic smile. While advancing toward the stone-bench he chuckled sneeringly, although alone, seeming to reply by this laughter to some secret thought.

When within three paces of the bench he perceived the old man, and paused, scanning him with his oblique and stealthy glance, although evidently fearing to let his purpose be seen. "You are enjoying the fresh air, Monsieur?" said he, approaching him with an abrupt movement.

The old man raised his head.

"Ha!" exclaimed the new-comer, "it is my illustrious master!"

"And you are my young practitioner?" said the old man.

"Will you permit me to take a seat beside you, Monsieur?"

"Most willingly," and the old man made room on the bench beside him.

"It appears that the king is getting better?" said the young man. "The people rejoice," and he burst a second time into his sneering laugh.

The old man made no reply.

"The whole day long the carriages have been rolling from Paris to Rueil, and from Rueil to Versailles. The Comtesse Dubarry will marry the king as soon as his health is re-established," and he burst into a louder laugh than before.

Still the old man made no reply.

"Pardon me if I laugh at Fate," continued the young man, with a gesture of nervous impatience, "but every good Frenchman, look you, loves his king, and my king is better to-day."

"Do not jest thus on such a subject, Monsieur," said the old man, gently. "The death of a man is always a misfortune for some one, and the death of a king is frequently a great misfortune for all."

"Even the death of Louis XV.?" interrupted the young man, in a tone of irony. "Oh, my dear master, a distin-

guished philosopher like you to sustain such a proposition! I know all the energy and skill of your paradoxes, but I cannot compliment you on this one."

The old man shook his head.

"And besides," added the new-comer, "why think of the king's death? Who speaks of such an event? The king has the small-pox; well, we all know that complaint. The king has beside him Bordeu and La Martinière, who are skilful men. Oh, I will wager a trifle, my dear master, that Louis the Well-Beloved will recover! Only this time the French people do not suffocate themselves in churches, putting up vows for him, as on the occasion of his former illness. Mark me, everything grows antiquated and is abandoned!"

"Silence!" said the old man, shuddering, — "silence! for I tell you, you are speaking of a man over whom the destroying angel hovers at this moment."

His young companion, surprised at this strange language, looked at the speaker, whose eyes were fixed on the façade of the chateau.

"Then you have more positive intelligence?" he asked.

"Look!" said the old man, pointing with his finger to one of the windows of the palace; "what do you behold yonder?"

"A window lighted up, — is that what you mean?"

"Yes; but lighted in what manner?"

"By a wax candle placed in a little lantern."

"Precisely."

"Well?"

"Well, young man, do you know what the flame of that wax-light represents?"

"No, Monsieur."

"It represents the life of the king."

The young man looked more fixedly at his aged companion, as if to be certain that he was in his senses.

"A friend of mine, Monsieur de Jussieu," continued the old man, "has placed that wax-light there, which will burn as long as the king is alive."

"It is a signal, then?"

"A signal which Louis XV.'s successor devours with his eyes from behind some neighboring curtain. This signal, which shall warn the ambitious of the dawn of a new reign, informs a poor philosopher like myself of the instant when the breath of the Almighty sweeps away, at the same moment, an epoch and a human existence."

The young man shuddered in his turn, and moved closer to his companion.

"Oh," said the aged philosopher, "mark well this night, young man! Behold what clouds and tempests it bears in its murky bosom! The morning which will succeed it I shall witness no doubt, for I am not yet old enough to abandon hope of seeing the morrow; but a reign is perhaps about to begin which you will witness even to the end, and which includes — like this night — mysterious events which I shall not see. It is not, therefore, without interest that I watch yonder trembling flame, whose signification I have just explained to you."

"True, my master," murmured the young man, "most true."

"Louis XIV. reigned seventy-three years," continued the old man. "How many will Louis XVI. reign?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the younger of the two, pointing to the window, which had just become shrouded in darkness.

"The king is dead!" said the old man, rising with a sort of terror; and both kept silence for some minutes.

Suddenly a chariot, drawn by eight fiery horses, started

at full gallop from the court-yard of the palace. Two outriders preceded it, each holding a torch in his hand. In the chariot were the dauphin, Marie Antoinette, and Madame Elizabeth, the sister of the king. The flame of the torches threw a gloomy light on their pale features. The carriage passed close to the two men, within ten paces of the bench from which they had risen.

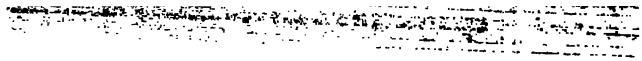
"Long live King Louis XVI.! Long live the queen!" shouted the young man in a loud, harsh voice, as if he meant to insult this new-born Majesty instead of saluting it.

The dauphin bowed; the queen showed her face at the window, sad and severe. The carriage dashed on and disappeared.

"My dear Monsieur Rousseau," said the younger of the two spectators, "then Madame Dubarry is a widow."

"To-morrow she will be exiled," said his aged companion. "Adieu, Monsieur Marat!"

THE END.



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